



Youth for Better Public Health: empowering future public health professionals through improved education and training

Introduction

A robust health system is essential for improving patient outcomes, attaining Universal Health Coverage (UHC), and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [1] Health systems can only function with a workforce of health workers. Public health professionals are a vital component of this workforce, contributing their expertise in disease prevention, health promotion, and health policy to advance public health objectives and improve the overall health of communities. [2]

The World Health Organization (WHO) projects a 10 million health workers shortfall by 2030, primarily in low- and lower-middle-income countries. Chronic underinvestment in the education and training of health workers in certain countries, along with a mismatch between education and employment strategies and the needs of health systems and populations, contributes to ongoing shortages. [3] The rising international migration of health workers could also worsen workforce shortages, especially in low- and lower-middle-income countries. In

certain nations, budgetary constraints prevent the public sector from absorbing the available health workers. Consequently, some countries experience the paradox of health worker unemployment alongside significant unmet health needs. [3]

To build a strong and dynamic public health workforce capable of securing a healthier and safer world for all, we need to ensure the youth are meaningfully engaged from conceptualisation and implementation to feedback. The United Nations ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, emphasising the significance of engaging children and young individuals in decision-making processes. This principle was expanded upon in the 2020 the WHO global consensus statement on adolescent and youth engagement, which states, *‘Meaningful adolescent and youth engagement is an inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between adolescents, youth, and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people’s ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms, and organisations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and world.’* [4] Over 250 organisations have endorsed this statement, and its progress is monitored and reported. [5]

Young WFPHA in collaboration with the Europubhealth+ Students and Alumni Association (EPHSA), the International Veterinary Students Association (IVSA), the International Pharmaceutical Students’ Federation (IPSF), and the International Federation of Medical Students’ Associations (IFMSA) designed a workshop aimed to engage students and young professionals in the field of public health to share their needs, opinions and experiences. The outcomes of these discussions are highlighted in this Youth Manifesto.

What are some of the biggest challenges and barriers you see in pursuing a career in public health?

Pursuing a career in public health presents several significant challenges and barriers. One of the primary obstacles shared by participants was the limited availability of professional opportunities and financing, making it difficult to secure paid entry-level positions that are crucial for gaining experience and understanding the field. Fresh graduates, in particular, face a scarcity of opportunities, which hinders their career development. Additionally, societal perceptions often undervalue public health careers, further complicating the path for aspiring professionals. The field also suffers from constrained budgets and limited resources, exacerbating the difficulties in finding and sustaining meaningful employment. These factors collectively create a challenging environment for those seeking to establish and grow their careers in public health.

What specific actions can be taken to overcome the challenges identified in entering the public health job market?

The challenges of entering the public health job market require specific actions to be undertaken. As young public health professionals, we want to recognise the lack of specialisation in public health as a major cause of the shortage of professionals in the field. Collaboration between states, public health organisations, and academic institutions is necessary to identify these shortages and create educational programs tailored to specific contexts. Providing financial support for public health professionals from disadvantaged backgrounds can ensure equitable access to these programs. Fair job conditions, especially for first job experiences, must be promoted to respect the rights of volunteers and interns. This involves tackling the competitiveness and under-prioritisation of public health that often lead to unfair work conditions for young professionals at early or first job experiences, such as no payment, underpayment, and lack of social security rights. Implementing guidance and

mentorship programs can support young professionals in navigating internships and job opportunities, understanding national public health systems, and easing their transition into the workforce. Raising awareness about the importance of public health careers across various fields, including health, pharmaceuticals, veterinary sciences, and social sciences, is also vital. Supporting platforms like IFMSA can effectively attract more candidates to this essential field by promoting public health jobs and providing internships.

Knowledge Gaps Identified

Students and young professionals who attended the Webinar showed keen interest in entering and advancing the Public Health Sector. They sought guidance on starting points when opportunities are limited, especially for those transitioning from different medical fields and gaining relevant experience to secure employment after pursuing a Master's in Public Health. There was significant interest in engaging with the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) initiatives and pursuing short-term internships alongside clinical careers. Another prominent topic was the potential impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, on public health research and practice.

Participants also inquired about how public health organisations can better support future professionals and the most crucial competencies for success in the evolving public health landscape. Many were interested in understanding how to meaningfully get involved in World Health Organization (WHO) initiatives, especially in remote countries where geopolitical barriers hinder public health development. Pharmacy students, in particular, sought to learn about pharmacists' roles in public health. Questions about the influence of gender norms on health-seeking behaviours and strategies to mitigate these effects also arise. Lastly, discussions on important topics in global health advocacy are suitable for peer-to-peer learning sessions like workshops, and available resources for further exploration are sought after.

were also highlighted for fostering trust and collaboration within communities and stakeholders.

The participants also emphasised the development of negotiation and diplomacy skills to recognise ever-growing complex political landscapes and secure support for public health agendas and interventions. These competencies are complemented by stakeholder mapping and analysis skills for identifying key allies and optimising collaboration and partnerships. Amongst the aforementioned skills and competencies, special emphasis was given on proficiency in research, resource collection, statistics, data processing, and analysis as essential components for students and young public health professionals. Last but not least, the participants acknowledged perseverance as a key skill for overcoming challenges and sustaining efforts in working on long-term public health initiatives.

These competencies collectively help us understand the need for a multifaceted skill set necessary for students and young public health professionals to be effective and impactful leaders in the community. Development of these competencies for students and young public health professionals should be aided with support and guidance from senior public health professionals through mentorship programs and exposure to the field of learning.

What do you think makes a mentorship program successful for helping students and young public health professionals advance in their careers?

In considering what makes a mentorship program successful in aiding the advancement of students and young public health professionals in their careers, several key elements emerge. Firstly, real involvement in practical activities allows mentees to gain hands-on experience and apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings. Additionally, step-by-step guidance throughout their career journey provides a structured framework for development and

progression. Furthermore, receiving realistic advice from experienced professionals offers valuable insights and perspectives, helping mentees navigate challenges and make informed decisions. Equipping mentees with technical skills and competencies through proper training ensures they are well-prepared to excel in their roles. Lastly, a comprehensive program encompassing all career paths available to public health professionals, along with training on important skills, ensures mentees are well-prepared to pursue various opportunities within the field.

How can academic institutions better prepare students for the demands of the public health workforce?

To better prepare students for the demands of the public health workforce, academic institutions can implement several key strategies. Recognizing the diverse skill set required in public health, institutions should integrate both soft and hard skills into their curricula, such as leadership and data analysis. These areas, often overlooked in traditional syllabi, are essential for success in this field.

Institutions should also offer clinical rotations within the public health sector, ideally during the final year of study, to provide students with practical insights into decision-making processes and effective advocacy before they enter the workforce. Additionally, workshops led by public health professionals focusing on research methodologies and article analysis can deepen students' understanding of community issues and enhance their problem-solving abilities.

Providing comprehensive career advice through tutoring programs and platforms like LinkedIn, as well as encouraging networking through focus groups, can help students explore opportunities and connect with professionals in the field. Moreover, emphasising the pivotal role of mentors can be invaluable, guiding students as they navigate the complexities of the

public health job market and enter the workforce with confidence.

What strategies can be employed to strengthen public health education?

To strengthen public health education, curriculum development should prioritise evidence-based practice, linking theoretical knowledge to real-world interventions. Additionally, public health programs should be more widely available at universities to address the growing global interest in the field. This is particularly crucial in countries which face significant public health challenges and lack a strong workforce.

Furthermore, public health education can be strengthened by fostering connections between academia and the professional world. While workshops and online networking opportunities provide valuable insights, a more comprehensive approach is needed. This includes internships, fieldwork and mentorship programs that connect students with experienced practitioners and help them gain experience.

By implementing these strategies, future generations of public health professionals can be equipped with the practical skills and knowledge needed to effectively address population health issues.

How can public health education be more inclusive and representative of diverse communities?

To improve the overall health of communities and advance public health outcomes and objectives, Public Health experts need to educate communities on different Public Health topics affecting each community. To ensure public health education is more inclusive and representative of diverse communities, Public Health education policies need to be adjusted to take into consideration the differences in community practices and beliefs.

The inclusion of community members as stakeholders in the tailoring and execution process of public health education will also help address the health challenges affecting each community fully. The development of learning materials in the local languages within the community for easier access and comprehension of the lessons planned could also be done. Community leaders are important and will often influence the involvement of community members, hence take into account to empower and include the community leaders first.

The health field requires inter collaboration for the interconnected public health work issues of the world. Hence inclusion of health workers in all levels of care, by training them fully, equipping them with skills and resources to deliver public health education to the diverse communities, is crucial. Public health education can be brought to the entire population in schools, and through community activities to promote health literacy and increase awareness. Additionally, there should be deliberate action to recruit and retain diverse members in the community, ensuring that public health programs are inclusive for everyone, including young professionals. Having programs that are tailored to the different genders and communities and packaged in a manner that responds to the needs of specific communities will also help educate diverse communities. Finally, it's up to educators and teachers to drive this cultural shift and ensure that public health education is comprehensive and inclusive.

REFERENCES

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The Europubhealth Students and Alumni Association (EPHSA) was established in 2013 with the mission of facilitating, strengthening and protecting personal and professional relationships among alumni, current and incoming students and partner institutions of the EPH+ programme. It aims to create networks to share career experiences and knowledge in the Public Health area, to collaborate with the EPH+ Consortium to promote the Master, and to represent EPH+ students and alumni.

The International Veterinary Students' Association (IVSA) is a student-run organisation representing over 38.000 students from over seventy countries. IVSA strives to benefit the animals and humans of the world by harnessing the potential and dedication of veterinary students to promote the international application of veterinary skills, education, and knowledge. As a result, one of its main goals is to raise the overall standard of veterinary education worldwide. Its Standing Committee on One Health (SCOH) aims to promote the importance of the One Health approach and the role of veterinarians in guaranteeing public health. Given the focus of the present paper, SCOH was deeply involved in its development.

The International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (IPSF) is an international non-governmental, non-political, non-religious and non-profit umbrella organisation representing more than 500,000 pharmacy and pharmaceutical science students and recent graduates from over 100 countries worldwide. IPSF was founded in 1949, making IPSF the oldest faculty-based student organisation in the world.

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) is a network of more than 1.3 million medical students from 139 national member organisations in 130 countries worldwide.