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NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND STUDIES IN PUBLIC HEALTH
PRACTICE

by

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Introduction

The concept of field assignment in public health practice to personnel undertaking training in public health is of recent origin. Medical educators seem to have realised the need for the trainees in undergraduate medical education, to be familiar with the community of their future practice, the area in which they have to work, the resources of the community, and the nature of the problems that may be encountered as well as the skills to combat or treat these problems. In short the medical schools in future should prepare from a very early stage of training, skills in community diagnosis of the various problem in much the same way as they would for developing diagnostic skills in diseases. The schools of public health are endeavouring to reduce the number of didactic lectures and replace them with field practices, demonstration of public health procedures through the use of audio-visual aids, and afford opportunities to public health trainees to be familiar with the methodology and procedure for public health research. International agencies in general and the World Health Organization in particular, are devoting a considerable attention toward assisting the schools in relieving the financial burden of trainees, providing advisory assistance, fellowships and supplies and

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equipment to the institutions responsible for public health training. This paper is an attempt to present a brief review of the new developments at the School of Public Health, Seoul National University which is the only institution in Korea for the training of public health leading to a degree of MPH.

Developments

Physical facilities

Developing countries in general face the limitation of financial resources in the provision of adequate physical facilities to schools of public health. It seems somewhat surprising that while reasonable finances seem to be forthcoming for the establishment of medical schools, reluctance on the part of the authorities for schools of public health appear common. Perhaps the one main reason for such a state of affairs is the lack of understanding and appreciation of the economic value of health, and ignorance of the greater financial and economic losses resulting from sickness and mortality in communicable and other diseases. This also seems to account for the unequal developments in curative and preventive services.

The school of public health in Seoul, is a unit of the national university located in the same building as the medical school and shares the space available with it. Continued efforts of the school have resulted in obtaining grants from the China Medical Board for the construction of a separate school building. These grants have not only stimulated the national authority to match them but to increase the amount to meet the full requirements of the building. This building, it is anticipated, would reach the completion stage in early 1970 and would provide sufficient teaching, laboratory and research space. It would also enable to add to the existing departments, the departments of public health nutrition, occupational health and social welfare.

Core-curriculum

The need of periodical readjustment of the core-curriculum, depending on the changing needs of the country hardly requires any further emphasis. Recently such readjustments have been made at the school, incorporating in it the subjects of health planning, international health and family planning as an integral part of health services.

Field practice

A distinguished delegate at the last conference very rightly pointed out that field practice area in public health is a laboratory to the trainees. Plans have been made at the school of public health in Korea for the establishment of a demonstration health centre in the vicinity of the school and hospital, in collaboration with the city health department and the Ministry of Health & Social Affairs, to cover a population with poor socio-economic conditions, simulating largely the conditions in rural areas.

The establishment of this demonstration health centre would meet one of the two principal requirements of field practice in a school of public health, an urban and a rural health centre. While continued efforts are made for establishing a demonstration centre for rural health practice, it must be admitted that difficulties in accommodation of trainees, transportation and the costs involved in upgrading the standards of health services, constitute at present major obstacles. Reliance has therefore to be made on the use of the demonstration centre thus planned for. Health practice in such a centre combined with observation visits to rural health services, it is hoped, would for the time being, afford reasonable opportunities to the trainees for developing their skills in public health practice.

In the proposed establishment of this centre it is not the object either to produce artificial conditions which actually do not exist or to have access to administrative control of the service. Until the establishment of services providing comprehensive health care at the various health centres,

the need of a demonstration centre is inevitable. Consideration would be given at this centre to (1) grant of honorary academic positions to the staff of the centre, and (2) provide academic consultative service from the point of view of training standards. Such a centre would not only be available to the MPH candidates and public health nurses, but also to the medical schools for public health practice assigned to trainees.

Family planning teaching

A problem of considerable importance to most developing countries is that of population growth. Until recently family planning in Korea has been put as somewhat an isolated and independent programme. This was intended to lay sufficient emphasis on the programme in relation to its magnitude and was therefore inevitable in the initial stages of policy making. Recently however the Ministry of Health & Social Affairs has planned to organise these services as an integral part of MCH services in the country.

As far as teaching is concerned, available evidence seems to show that most of the schools of public health have yet to evolve a suitable course content in family planning and population problems. In Korea this subject is presented as:

1. an integral part of MCH, and
2. an elective subject

Field practice is limited to a few observation visits in family planning programmes.

In view of the importance of population growth in developing countries, there seems to be no doubt that the subject of family planning teaching should constitute in all schools of public health an important activity, and should, therefore, have a place in all generally required courses. Moreover, all schools of public health should endeavour to demonstrate, both academically and in the field, that family planning is as good a part of a public health service as environment health or communicable disease control, and

should, therefore, be a function of a public health department both in urban and rural health services.

Public Health Nursing

Public health is team work and an official of the public health department has naturally to be associated with his team members, the sanitarians, public health nurses, health educators, engineers and others. Although the newer concept of shifting emphasis from environmental health to that of preventive and social medicine is gaining importance, it would take a considerably long time in most developing countries to reach a stage of completion in combating the problems arising from the sanitation of the environment, more particularly in relation to the health of mothers and children. Public health nursing would thus continue to be a core service of a health centre. The schools of public health would have an important role in providing consultative services in the field or even provide for the training of public health nurses.

The school of public health in Korea has organised, since 1967 a one year course in public health nursing leading to a certificate of the University to successful candidates. This programme operates with WHO/UNICEF assistance in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health & Social Affairs. The school has also set up a department of public health nursing, with an assistant professor and a teaching assistant. During the current year five candidates have also been selected for the MPH training with a major concentration in public health nursing.

Cooperation of concerned Ministries

The Ministry of Education, through the school of public health, trains the public health personnel and the Ministries of Health as well as of Home Affairs are the consumers (in Korea the health centres and sub-centres are administered through the Ministry of Home Affairs in the provinces). From the point of view of consumption as well as procurement of international

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assistance to the health services, a coordination of all concerned Ministries seems necessary. Large strides have been made in Korea in securing such cooperation. Of particular interest in this context is the coordination of the Ministry of Education and Health, which has resulted in constant provision by the school of consultative service in health services in general and health and family planning programmes in particular, securing international assistance, establishment of a joint Government/WHO/UNICEF assisted training project at the school, and provision of relief in the financial burden of the trainees.

International assistance

International assistance particularly from WHO to the training programmes is of considerable importance. A brief outline of such assistance and its impact to the training is given in the following paragraphs.

WHO assistance:

Long term advisory services have been provided to the school. This assistance has enabled inter alia the school in readjustment of the course content covering the international health, health planning and other details, fellowships, equipment and supplies. The project has been of immense value in providing operational support in teaching activities, obtaining of consultative services in public health nutrition and strengthening of the school faculty both for the present and future, at the school. Recently its activities have been extended to cover the medical schools in the country insofar as the teaching of preventive and social medicine is concerned. It is hoped that at the appropriate time it would be possible to evolve an education and training component to the social development plan.

(An important feature of this assistance is the provision of relief of financial burden to the trainees undertaking a three year compulsory

government service on completion of training. Government and WHO through a committee provide, to each beneficiary, a monthly sum equivalent to US \$135.00 during the first year of training. This if successful would provide more and more medical personnel trained in public health to the health services in the country.

UNICEF assistance:

Through the WHO assisted project for the training of health and medical workers, UNICEF supplies, basic equipment to the departments, textbooks and reference material as well as transport for the field training. Local grants are also made available for stipend to trainees in public health nursing and fee for the lecturers.

China Medical Board assistance:

The Board has sanctioned substantial grants for the construction of a school building and for serological equipment and supplies. It has also rendered financial assistance for the in-country and inter-country travel of the faculty with the obvious advantage of building up of field experience of the school faculty. All these ~~have~~ stimulated the national authorities for investment in public health training at the school.

ILO assistance:

Advisory assistance to the establishment of a national institute for occupational health as well as teaching in occupational health has been made available. Following this assistance a survey on occupation diseases is in progress at the school. This assistance would provide a stimulus to the training of the personnel in occupational health, thus providing trained personnel to the rapidly growing industries in Korea.

Evaluation of the students' performance

The method of examination differs in different countries. Some schools take into consideration the periodical tests and examinations throughout the year which gets added to the comprehensive examination, while others attach

great importance to the faithful reproduction, in the comprehensive examination, of material provided in the didactic lectures, regardless of the student's ability. The conference of the directors of schools of public health however provides opportunities for a common procedure that may be considered as the most suitable method of such evaluation. As a matter of fact this evaluation is a two way process indicating the student's ability in acquiring skills during his learning on the one hand, and the teacher's ability to impart these skills on the other. Regardless of the procedure that may be accepted, it seems necessary to provide to the trainees toward the end of the learning period, sufficient opportunity to criticise the training programme, so that future training be readjusted in the light of those criticisms.

Research

A department in teaching without research may be considered as sterile. Research should be an integral part of the teaching activities, and the trainees associated with it insofar as the methodology and procedure is concerned. It is not the writer's intention to go into what has been published at the school, but it seems justifiable to state that generally speaking, research projects are subject to financial grants from various agencies. The national authorities should have regular budget allocations for this important function in the schools of public health, which would imply a recognition that research is a function of a training institution.

Refresher training

Research in the scientific field on the globe is a continuous process. Concepts are rapidly changing, and new techniques are being explored for combating sickness and preventible mortality. It seems, therefore, essential for all schools of public health to have a machinery, for supplementing their own knowledge as well as of their old trainees. Periodical refresher training provides a suitable means of attaining this objective. The schools of public health should include in their activities, a provision for such

courses. In Korea this programme is in planning and expected to be commenced after the completion of the new school building.

Inter-regional cooperation

During the deliberations of the last conference of the Directors of Schools of Public Health, it was pointed out that there is considerable variation in the stages of development at the different schools/institutes, in the health services as applied to training. Our efforts should be directed to secure not only regional, but inter-regional cooperation through WHO, and a fruitful step in this direction seems to be a programme of inter-regional visits of the faculty.

Conclusion

Most developing countries have not yet developed the health services, to meet the training standards of public health practice. Reliance has therefore to be made on the establishment of training and demonstration centres in urban and rural health practice. International assistance, particularly WHO assistance to the schools, is of primary importance not only in attaining in due time self sufficiency in training, but also in stimulating the national authorities for investment in the promotion and development of basic health services with a high priority to training. Family planning and population dynamics should constitute a requirement of all generally required course. National authorities should recognize research as a recognized function of a school of public health and, a suitable examination system should be evolved with opportunities to trainees for criticisms on training, in the light of their own experiences. Refresher training should be organized in schools of public health, and WHO should consider support to a well planned programme of inter-regional cooperation.