Report of the ASPHER-EUPHA Working Group on Ethics and Values in Public Health Policy and Practice in the European Region: Developing a Recommended Curriculum on Public Health Ethics[1]
31 January 2012

Introduction

Following an ASPHER Working paper on Mission and Values in Public Health, a DELPHI study was conducted among ASPHER members, which identified ethical aspects in public health education as a priority. As a consequence, an ASPHER working group on ethics was established, in collaboration with the EUPHA section Ethics in Public Health, and has put this topic into its work plan.

The Ethics in Public Health Working Group conducted a survey in 2010 which revealed that only a minority of ASPHER member programs in public health education had formal courses in PH Ethics, and a follow up survey was conducted in 2011. Our Working group will continue its work in 2012 toward development of a recommended curriculum in this topic with supportive case studies to help new schools to include this topic in their core curricula. This is especially important as a larger Europe which now includes countries in transition from political control of health in the past. New generations of public health leadership will benefit from exposure to more universal values in their work in health policy and public health practice.

We will take advantage of existing recommended courses in other jurisdictions but in the context that public health is international and case studies are to illustrate issues and not to represent specific nationalities. The Working Group set out to search in the literature what topics, methods and resources there are for ethics education.

This report is submitted as a work in progress and in conjunction with related activities of the Working group including the special issues of Public health Reviews on PH Ethics, the survey of program and other activities to promote conducting of PH ethics courses as well as bibliography and source material searcher to deepen the approach to this issue.

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[1] The Working Group includes: Theodore Tulchinsky MD MPH (Braun School of Public Health, Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Chairman, Els Maeckelberghe PhD (University Medical Center Groningen, Co Chair (EUPHA), Co Chair; Members: Carmen Aceijas PhD (University of East London), Jutta Lindert PhD (Berlin University), Peter Schröder-Bäck PhD (Maastricht University), Louise Stjernberg PhD (Blekinge Institute of Technology, School of Health Science).

Curriculum Basics

The purpose of teaching Public Health ethics in educational programs for public health professionals is to promote analytic methods and concepts for addressing ethical issues that arise in public health practice on a continuing basis.

The teaching of ethics benefits from associated disciplines such as philosophy and theology, but the competencies required of public health practitioners and policy makers are closely linked to evolving science and social policy as well as theoretical reasoning.

The Eugenics movement of the early part of the twentieth century in led to forced sterilizations in the name of "social hygiene" and public health. These practices were adopted in Nazi Germany and in the name of "racial purification" led to mass murder of mentally and physically handicapped children and adults. This set the precedent for concentration camps and mass murder on an industrial scale of the socially and politically outcast populations, along with the outrageous criminal medical research practices in Nazi concentration camps.

Post war trials for crimes against humanity led to the Nuremberg Code arising defining bioethics and protection of individuals from enforced medical research and defining ethical basic research standards. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki accords defined safeguards to protect people from immoral research practices. Public opinion mobilized in cases of abuse of public health such as in the Tuskegee experiment in the United States further demonstrated how crucial these safeguards are to public health research and practice.

These and many subsequent issues continue to face public health policy and practice and thus must be incorporated in teaching programs. The Ethics Working Group has moved ahead with the task of defining key issues for content and development of a recommended curriculum of public health ethics.

Objectives

We will address the Core Competencies expected of graduates of public health training, which are equally important standards for public health policy makers and operational systems themselves. The Core competencies articulated in another ASPHER Working Group we defined in the following table:

Intellectual competences: The student shall know and understand:
Major ethical theories and concepts relevant for public health, including human rights concepts; Significant aspects of the history of ethics, including historical examples of misuse of public health principles for political ends; Significant aspects of the history of ethics; Important ethical concepts, e.g.:   o Autonomy/self decisiveness;

o Paternalism;

o Uninvited intervention;

o Responsibility;

o Respect;

o Acceptability and acceptance;

o Non-discrimination;

o Human rights;

Good epidemiological practice and good clinical practice ('best practice'), including ethical aspects of data handling, confidentiality, security, privacy and disclosure;

Ethical dimensions of:

o Public health strategy making, including the ethical challenges of each individual stage of a strategy;

o Professionalism in relation to the implementation of responsibilities and

In the context of accountability in an institutional context;

Ethics committee systems and requirements for ethical approval of public health research in at least one European country.

Practical competences: The student shall be able to:

Identify ethical aspects of concrete public health interventions, strategies and policies;

Demonstrate the implementation of basic ethical principles in public health strategy making, such as a non-discriminatory approach to target populations and in human resources management;

Respect and adhere to ethical principles regarding data protection and confidentiality regarding any information obtained as part of professional activities;

Prepare an application to the ethics committee system within the context of appropriate research governance, as determined in one particular country.

Source: Ethics competences for MPH students identified within ASPHER (ASPHER 2011)

Precedents

The American public Health Association addressed this topic as follows:

"A code of ethics for public health clarifies the distinctive elements of public health and the ethical Principles that follow from or respond to those distinct aspects. It makes clear to populations and communities and the ideals of the public health institutions that serve them. A code of ethics thus serves as a goal to guide public health institutions and practitioners and as a standard to which they can be held accountable.

Codes of ethics are typically relatively brief; they are not designed to provide a means of untangling convoluted ethical issues. That process requires deliberation and debate over the multitude of factors relevant to a particular issue. Nor does a code typically provide a means of resolving a particular dispute. It does, however, provide those in a dispute over a public health concern with a list of issues and principles that should be considered in the dispute. ". *(Principlesof the Ethical Practice of Public Health, 2002.)*

The American Association of Schools of Public Health Model Curriculum was developed in a lengthy process described as follows:

"Ethics in Public Health: A Model Curriculum grew out of a series of meetings and discussions by leading researchers and educators in public health beginning with a meeting convened in Washington DC in May 2000. This meeting was sponsored by the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH) and the Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA). It brought together teachers of ethics from nearly every school of public health, other experts in ethics and public health, and representatives of the government and public health practice communities. One of the clearest recommendations to come out of that meeting was that educational materials and resources should be developed to enhance curricular and continuing professional education offerings. HRSA generously agreed to fund the development of a collection of modules, through their Cooperative Agreement with ASPH.

In June 2001 a special advisory group was formed and met in Washington to plan the new curriculum. During this period The Hastings Center was working on a project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to promote the discussion of ethical issues within public health. This effort converged so well with the HRSA/ASPH effort that the two groups joined forces and their collaboration began with the advisory meeting. At that meeting it was agreed that the curriculum would take the form of several self-contained units or modules, each written by a leading expert on the topic in question, and each containing the same types of resources for classroom use—an analysis of the ethical question, several case studies with commentary for discussion, resources for further study and research, and the like. Shortly after the June 2001 advisory group meeting experts in ethics and public health were recruited to write the modules, with the understanding that they would work closely with local members of the public health practice community to be sure that concerns and issues from the practice community were well represented." (Jennings B et al., 2003 and the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH) Ethics and Public Health: Model Curriculum.
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The resulting ASPH curriculum model included the following modules:

Module 1: Tradition, Profession, and Values in Public Health
Module 2: The Legacy of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study
Module 3A: Research Ethics in Public Health
Module 3B: Public Health Research and Practice in International Settings: Special Ethical Concerns
Module 4: Community-Based Practice and Research: Collaboration and Sharing Power
Module 5: Ethics and Infectious Disease Control: STDs, HIV, TB
Module 6: Ethics of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
Module 7: Ethical Issues in Environmental and Occupational Health
Module 8: Public Health Genetics: Screening Programs and Individual Testing/Counseling
Module 9: Public Health and Health System Reform: Access, Priority Setting, and Allocation of Resources

The United Nations Education and Science Organization (UNESCO) Center for Bioethics addressed the idea of promotion of an educational curriculum for teaching of Bioethics which included public Health Ethics (UNESCO) Bioethics core curriculum study materials for Ethics education programmes included:

Course Learning Objectives
UNIT 1: What is ethics?
UNIT 2: What is bioethics?
UNIT 3: Human dignity and human rights
UNIT 4: Benefit and harm
UNIT 5: Autonomy and individual responsibility
UNIT 6: Consent
UNIT 7: Persons without the capacity to consent
UNIT 8: Respect for human vulnerability and personal integrity
UNIT 9: Privacy and confidentiality
UNIT 10: Equality, justice and equity
UNIT 11: Non-discrimination and non-stigmatization
UNIT 12: Respect for cultural diversity and pluralism
UNIT 13: Solidarity and cooperation
UNIT 14: Social responsibility and health
UNIT 15: Sharing of benefits
UNIT 16: Protecting future generations
UNIT 17: Protection of the environment, the biosphere and biodiversity."

There are many high quality anthologies on public health ethics that offer good foundation material for teaching purposes with aid of a bibliography prepared by this Working Group. As case studies are crucial for education, we will make use of existing publications and journals in the field, including the 2012 forthcoming issues of Public Health Reviews on this topic and the European Commission on Bioethics.

Current Status

The distinction between Bioethics and Public Health Ethics does not have a clear dividing line. Protection of individual rights sometimes is seen to conflict with community rights. The issues include the right of preventing illness and risk factors by legislative or health promotion efforts to stop the spread of disease. Case studies provide lessons learned in dealing with such conflicts as do legal cases and the advance of science and technology, economics and issues related to inequalities in health which convert individual prevention to population based prevention which are often mutually dependant.

The ASPHER-EUPHA Working Group is exploring the curriculum content of both theoretical and practical application of ethical principles with selected case studies. Public Health Reviews will be publishing two special issues on PH Ethics during 2012, one on basic principles and one on case studies. This will be used to develop teaching material to identify moral issues, ethical concepts (theories, methods, principles, rules, or virtues) that can be applied to the problem. Ethics can help to elaborate on the issue at stake and can offer criteria to find solutions. At least, ethics can help to give reasons and to justify actions or omissions. Secondly, our work will address the moral (and legal) mandate for public

institutions to work on population health especially if this implies restrictions on individual persons' liberty. Thirdly, the relationship works the other way round: public health can push ethics to deal with certain issues. If, moral problems are observed in practice that have never been dealt with this might provide a challenges for ethicists to develop tools or theories that can be applied again to the moral issues. Thus, public health practice stimulates ethical theory building

The main topics will try to answer the questions raised for competencies of public health graduates but also the examination of ongoing issues in public health that continuously arise.

The Ethic in Public Health Working Group conducted a survey showing that only a minority of ASPHER member programs in public health education have formal courses in PH Ethics. Our Working Group will continue its work in 2012-13 toward development of a recommended curriculum in this topic with supportive case studies to help new schools to include this topic in their core curricula. We will take advantage of existing recommended courses in other jurisdictions but in the context that public health is international and case studies are to illustrate issues and not to represent specific nationalities.

This report is submitted as a work in progress and in conjunction with related activities of the Working Group including the special issues of *Public Health Reviews* on PH Ethics, the survey of program and other activities to promote conducting of PH ethics courses as well as bibliography and source material searcher to deepen the approach to this issue. The topic is vital for public health education and practice. Our Working group endeavors to meet the challenge of providing a recommended curriculum and source material.

Report on Behalf of:
Chair - Theodore Tulchinsky (ASPHER)
Co Chair - Els Maeckelberghe (EUPHA)

Members:
Carmen Aceijas
Jutta Lindert
Robert Otok
Peter Schröder-Bäck
Louise Stjernberg

Staff:
Caroline Brall (University of Maastricht)

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