

## **Master Programs in Public Health – Dilemmas and Challenges**

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### **A need for scientific approach in public health**

Effective and efficient organization and problem solution require scientific approach, research and complex knowledge of the public health professionals. This specific knowledge and research experience of the medical and other professionals working in public health is not possible to obtain during undergraduate and graduate education. Even, if society and academic administration would agree to include such teaching modules in the curriculum of the medical and other universities, it would not be rational and efficient. This would be more rational to organize such education on postgraduate level. Postgraduate education on PhD level is appropriate for those public health professionals who will the most of their workload spent in research and scientific project. But for the most of public health practitioners it will be not appropriate, it will take too much time in their professional development. They should be oriented toward practice.

### **Multidisciplinarity of public health**

Public health practice requires several disciplines to be involved in solving the public health problems: physicians, nurses, engineers, economists, social scientist, social workers and others. To understand better each other and to be prepared for the joint work in the community part of their education and professional development should be in the multidisciplinary environment. This approach was recognized in Europe in the last 20 years as one of the criteria of good practice (EMPE – European Multiprofessional Educational Network is one example).

### **Master program as an obligatory unit of professional development of public health as a medical discipline (specialty)**

European standard requires 3-4 years of the specialty training after graduation for medical doctors to be able to work in public health practice. During their professional development one part of training should be planned and organized. This is the practice in the most of European countries. Public health professionals prefer type of education in their development in which they can combine academic link. For some of them decision for further research career will come later. Master program of one or two years satisfy their expectations.

### **Current state in public health training and research in SEE countries**

Preparing the Conference «Public Health Training and Research Collaboration in South Eastern Europe (PH-SEE)» in Dubrovnik 2001, the coordinating group recognized the need of the current state description in Public health training in SEE countries and exchange of past and present experiences as a prerequisite for future mutual collaboration. To stimulate similar presentations, a country questionnaire was developed and sent in

advance. The key questions were specifically related to the present state in each country on:

- Public health postgraduate study/course (type and organization)
- Verification (accreditation) of public health postgraduate study/course
- Vocational (medical) specialities in public health and preventive medicine
- Responsibility for the financing of the public health postgraduate study and vocational training.

Representatives from nine universities gave a short review of the current state (Kovacic-Zagreb; Premik-Ljubljana; Donev-Skopje; Kristoforovic-Novi Sad; Masic, Smajkic, and Hrabac-Sarajevo; Krasniqi-Prishtina; Burazeri-Tirana; Ovcharov-Sofia; Laaser-Bielefeld). In summary, presentations and discussion pointed out to few important considerations as follows:

- There are many similarities in public health training within SEE countries, but some specificities developed over the past years;
- There is a lack of multiprofessional training in public health - postgraduate study usually a part of medical specialization (vocational training) in almost all SEE countries (Zagreb and Bielefeld as exceptions);
- Postgraduate study is usually paid by participants themselves or by employers;
- Postgraduate studies are organized by different institutions, usually belonging to a medical school or university. Four schools of public health (Prishtina, Skopje, Ljubljana and Sofia) are in the process of establishment of the school of public health.

### **Master programs – long tradition in ASSPH**

Andrija Štampar School of Public Health has a long tradition in education of public health professionals, both as part of medical specialisation and training for research. This training started in 1948 with public health, school medicine, epidemiology and continued with other professions (family medicine, medical informatics, environmental health, gerontology, management, microbiology, sport medicine, social pediatrics, and others). Courses in public health, gerontology, informatics, school hygiene were multidisciplinary. Other courses were for medical doctors only, as a part of medical training.

### **OSI/ASPHER project to support capacity building in public health**

The Open Society Institute through ASPHER finances the reconstruction of master program education in public health and related areas in the ASSPH. The project is designed to organize teaching in modular system, to support education of teachers in educational skills and knowledge and to end with the accreditation of all programs involved. Until now it is finished the process of identification of needs and demands in education of different professionals, set-up and analyzed the list of competencies, and identified the common teaching modules.

### **Questions and dilemmas:**

- Do we need organised and planned training after graduation for public health professional for one or two years;
- Do we need PhD programme for public health practitioners;

- Do we recognise multiprofessional education in a form of master programme as need in the professional development in the public health;
- What is the situation in different regions in Europe.