

Public health opportunities and exposure within undergraduate medical education.

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Background:

Within undergraduate medical curriculum, Public Health education and opportunity is sparse. This limited exposure is intriguing, considering many clinicians will work within the frameworks of public health direction and benefit from small- and large-scale initiatives. To better understand the work of public health physicians and policy development, this author engaged in three distinct electives throughout their medical degree.

Aim:

This work acts as a reflection on multiple opportunities to engage within public health throughout undergraduate medical education, and the teachings gained from these experiences.

Reflection:

Three key electives were undertaken by the author to enrich public health teaching within their medical curriculum, as per the Australian Medical Council's Graduate Outcomes framework¹:

A undergraduate 'International Health' elective:

This course, delivered by the University of Adelaide, provided the author with a theoretical approach to public health principles in a global context.² Delivered by a senior lecturer with an abundance of practical experience in public health program initiation and review, it provided a sound overview of global health and public policy in the international field.

Clinical placement at Intermediate Care Services: Located in Adelaide's Northern suburbs, this clinic focused on preventative care within a framework dedicated to hospital-avoidance, the first service of its kind in South Australia³. By running as a specialised primary care clinic, the purpose of the service was to increase healthcare access to some of the communities most marginalised individuals. It achieved this through; provision of multidisciplinary approach to healthcare, provision of outreach services to the homeless, assisting with emergency housing, provision of a refugee health service and specialised home visits from healthcare workers for patients at risk of hospital presentation. Through this model of preventative healthcare delivery, the unit was successful in decreasing hospital presentations and supporting patients discharge pathways to facilitate better health outcomes.

Research-based elective at South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute in the Aboriginal Health Equity Unit: The author undertook a 4-week public health research elective within Australia's largest dedicated Aboriginal health research unit, at working within the Sexual Health and Wellbeing division⁴. The author was able to engage with current projects led by the unit, assist with drafting works and analysing data, and network within the unit and its key stakeholders. The author was able to develop improved understanding of the nature and work of public health and policy beyond the theoretical, especially related to considerations for culturally appropriate research when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Conclusion:

Placements within the public health sphere for undergraduate medical students provide an invaluable understanding and appreciation for policy development and principles of universal health promotion. Exposure from the theoretical, research and clinical perspectives created a rounded understanding for a medical graduate, in keeping with the Australian Medical Council's Graduate Outcomes framework.

References:

¹ Australian Medical Council Limited. Standards for Assessment and Accreditation of Primary Medical Programs by the Australian Medical Council 2012. [PDF]. Canberra, Australian Medical Council, 2012. [cited 18 February 2022]. Available at: <https://www.amc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Standards-for-Assessment-and-Accreditation-of-Primary-Medical-Programs-by-the-Australian-Medical-Council-2012.pdf>

² The University of Adelaide. Course Outline: PUB HLTH 3122 - International Health III. [Internet]. Public Health, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide; 2018 [cited 18 February 2022]. Available at: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/course-outlines/105042/1/winter/2018/>

³ Cosenza, E. New service to keep people out of crowded hospital emergency departments. [Internet]. Adelaide, Central Adelaide Local Health Network, 2020. [cited 18 February 2022]. Available at: <https://centraladelaide.health.sa.gov.au/hospital-avoidance-and-supported-discharge-service/>

⁴ South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute. Aboriginal Health Equity. [Internet]. Adelaide, SAHMRI, 2022. [Cited 18 February 2022]. Available at: <https://sahmri.org.au/research/themes/aboriginal-health/research-programs>