

THE ORGANIZATION OF EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW COMPETENCIES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

ORGANIZÁCIA VZDELÁVANIA V KONTEXTE NOVÝCH KOMPETENCIÍ VO VEREJNOM ZDRAVOTNÍCTVE

MIČÍKOVÁ Lucia^{1,2}, ZEMANOVÁ Miroslava¹, VESELÁ Nora³, VOSTRÝ Michal¹, SAMEŠ Martin¹

¹ Univerzita J.E. Purkyně v Ústí nad Labem, Fakulta zdravotnických studií, Ústí nad Labem, Česká republika

² Slovenská zdravotnícka univerzita v Bratislave, Fakulta verejného zdravotníctva, Bratislava, Slovenská republika

³ Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, Fakulta zdravotnických věd, Olomouc, Česká republika

ABSTRACT

Background: Competencies in public health are a crucial component in the effective functioning of professionals in public health systems. Defining new areas of competency is essential given the current situation and workforce distribution.

Objective: The aim of this contribution is to map out the themes of new competencies for professionals in the field of public health.

Methodology: The theoretical analysis of key documents from ASPHER, regarding the new curricula for professionals in public health.

Results: These competencies represent a combination of individual attributes such as knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. The new ASPHER curricula reflect the current situation in the field of public health.

Discussion: The field of public health currently encompasses various types of professionals who are engaged in this area. It is essential for competencies to reflect all areas that are part of public health.

Conclusion: The development of new curricula is a necessary condition for improving the quality of the workforce in the field of public health.

Key words: ASPHER. Competencies. Public health professionals. Public health. Education.

ABSTRAKT

Východiská: Kompetencie v oblasti verejného zdravia predstavujú dôležitú súčasť efektívneho fungovania odborníkov vo verejnom zdravotníctve. Nové vymedzenie oblastí kompetencií je nevyhnutnosťou vzhľadom na súčasnú situáciu, ale aj rozloženie pracovných síl.

Ciel': Cieľom príspevku je zmapovať témy nových kompetencií pre odborníkov v oblasti verejného zdravia.

Metodika: Teoretická analýza kľúčových dokumentov ASPHER, k „Projektu aktualizácie core curricula“.

Výsledky: Kompetencie predstavujú kombináciu jednotlivých atribútov, ako sú vedomosti, zručnosti a profesionálne postoje. Nový návrh aktualizácie core curricula ASPHER reflektujú súčasnú situáciu v oblasti verejného zdravia.

Diskusia: Oblasť verejného zdravia dnes disponuje rôznymi typmi pracovníkov, ktorý sa zaoberajú touto oblasťou. Je nevyhnutné, aby kompetencie reflektovali všetky oblasti, ktoré sú súčasťou verejného zdravia.

Záver: Aktualizácia curricul je nevyhnutnou podmienkou pre

zvyšovanie kvality pracovnej sily v oblasti verejného zdravia s ohľadom na nové výzvy a priority pre verejné zdravie.

Kľúčové slová: ASPHER. Kompetencie. Profesionáli vo verejnom zdravotníctve. Verejné zdravie. Vzdelávanie.

BACKGROUND

Currently, the fields of public health and healthcare are facing many challenges that reflect the events and changes of recent years. These challenges primarily relate to demographic developments, socio-economic shifts, technological advancements, as well as political changes, the climate crisis, and importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of various other diseases [1]. According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2024), data indicates an increase in cases of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and whooping cough. Since 2023, these two diseases have been on the rise in several European Union member states. It is crucial to continuously strive to identify gaps in herd immunity and protect vulnerable groups within the population [2]. These major challenges represent only a fraction of the events that public health professionals must address, considering future cross-border threats. The competencies of public health professionals can be seen as a key tool for effectively responding to the current situation as well as future challenges. They provide professionals with a framework to effectively address public health issues.

THE AIM of this paper is to map out the themes of new competencies for public health professionals.

METHODOLOGY

The research method was a theoretical analysis of key documents from ASPHER (The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region) dealing with the competencies of public health professionals, as well as relevant scholarly articles on the following topics:

- Definition of competencies,
- Public health professionals,
- The new normal and areas of public health.

RESULTS

For the effective work of every professional in the field of public health, it is essential to correctly identify the competencies for efficient performance. The competencies represent a combination of individual attributes, such as knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes [3]. The main goal of education for public health professionals is to possess the necessary competencies. These competencies maintain and improve the health of population; and they also apply a comprehensive approach to public health. They also help public health directors implement approaches to identify workforce gaps, design job descriptions, and comprehensively support resource management within the public health sector [4].

Given the complexity of responding to major public health issues, specialists are needed who possess not only education and knowledge in public health but also competencies in interdisciplinary areas, legislative knowledge, and expertise in management. Public health professionals, for whom competencies in public health are necessary, can be divided into three basic groups according to their job activities.

The Wider Workforce in Public Health

Professionals outside the healthcare sector whose activities affect public health can participate in providing services to citizens. This includes employees at various positions in government and local authorities who adopt and implement legislative frameworks, policies, or programs.

Healthcare and Social Care Workers

Workers in this field have great potential, particularly in health promotion, health protection, and disease prevention. This mainly concerns healthcare workers or social service workers whose primary competency is focused on health and social services.

Public Health Professionals

Public health professionals deal with these issues as part of their primary job responsibilities. Their role is to address issues in all areas of public health. They can provide leadership, interconnection, synergy, and creating strategies for the effective functioning of public health. They include not only traditional public health professions such as doctors or professionals specializing in public health, but also a wide range of experts working in this field. These are experts involved in public health protection, disease prevention, health promotion, service provision and quality, as well as experts in the programs and projects that are focused on public health [5].

Young Public Health Professionals

Another important part of the public health workforce are young public health professionals. These are the students and early-career professionals who represent great potential in public health. Young professionals can provide new perspectives and increase diversity in this field. Public health is continuously evolving and requires a sufficient workforce [6]. Young professionals play a key role in creating curricula for public health. Their new perspectives, innovative ideas, and knowledge of new technologies are essential for designing comprehensive and adaptive educational frameworks [7].

New Competencies for Capacity Building and Curriculum Development in Public Health

To create new competency areas for capacity building in public health, it is essential to base them on the WHO-ASPHER competency framework. The WHO-ASPHER competency framework is a tool that provides a more comprehensive and integrated approach to categories of competencies necessary in the field of public health [8] (Table 1).

ASPHER, in collaboration with the WHO, is preparing a new major project for capacity building and curriculum development in public health. This new framework is based on the so-called "new normal." The new normal refers to a continuous state of risk requiring a state of readiness for change, which cannot be fully controlled or overcome and requires regulation.

Constant changes inevitably lead to new phenomena that affect individuals, professionals, and society in general. In the context of public health,

the "new normal" is shaped by demographic and socio-economic influences, scientific and technological advancements, political changes, unrest and migration, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic [9]. The updated competencies for public health professionals according to ASPHER need to reflect new knowledge and skills that are acquired and will be required of future public health professionals (Figure 1) [10]. The new areas of competencies for capacity building and curriculum development in public health include the following areas [11] (Table 2).

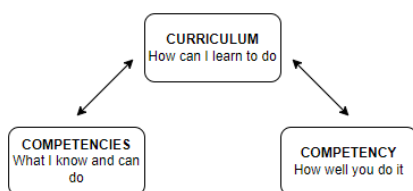


Figure 1 Curriculum – Competencies - Competency

Table 1 WHO-ASPHER Framework of Categories and Competencies

Categories	Competencies
Content and Context	Science and Practice Health Promotion Law, Policies, and Ethics One Health and Health Security
Relationships and Interactions	Leadership and Systems Thinking Collaboration and Partnerships Communication, Culture, and Advocacy
Performance and Achievement	Management and Resource Management Professional Development and Reflective Ethical Practice Organizational Literacy and Adaptability

Table 2 ASPHER Core Curriculum Programme

Core Curriculum Subject Areas	
Epidemiology	Biostatistics and Data Interpretation
Disease Prevention	Public Health Ethics
Economics in Public Health	Communicable Disease Epidemiology
Occupational Epidemiology	Public Health Nutrition
Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Management	Public Health and Criminal Justice
Diversity and Intersectionality	Psychology, Mental Health, Wellbeing
One Health	Public Health Literacy, Infodemiology
Evidence Synthesis	Communication Skills
Evidence into Policy and Action	Leadership and Management
Public Health Research Methods	Health Protection
Health Promotion	Low for Public Health
Health Systems Organisation	Epidemiology of Noncommunicable Diseases and Disability
Environmental and Climate Health	Architecture and Health
Public Health in Conflict and War	Determinants of Health
Health in Vulnerable Populations	Global Public Health
Digital Transformation in Public Health	Critical Thinking/Evidence Synthesis
Integrative Learning in Action	Public Health Advocacy; Negotiation
Collaboration and Partnerships	-

DISCUSSION

The new competencies for capacity building in public health reflect the current situation in this field. Building the capacities of professionals is the key to effectively address public health issues. The countries in the WHO European region face challenges such as climate change, urbanization, socio-economic shifts, non-communicable diseases, mental and behavioral health risks, misinformation,

health inequalities, and shortages in the health and social care workforce [12].

Public health today touches on various professionals in different sectors and is not limited to the domain of healthcare. New workforce groups are being created whose main job activities are not directly related to public health, but their work activities are closely connected to it. As an example, these professionals deal with the issues of quality of

working life. This is a multidimensional concept that typically refers to an individual's feelings or attitudes towards work organization and employment and includes aspects such as opportunities for development, the use of one's talent, remuneration, and impact on personal life and well-being [13]. Another group includes the professionals in healthcare and social care, whose competencies also relate to public health. For these groups, it is possible to implement public health competencies and thus improve functioning at the health-social interface, which is a very discussed topic given the current demographic situation.

Public health professionals and young professionals are two groups for whom new competencies are crucial for their job roles. The latest ASPHER competencies were published in 2018; therefore, it was agreed in 2022 that it is necessary to respond to new areas after the global COVID-19 pandemic and other crises that have occurred.

The preparation of the Core Curriculum Programme includes several phases: Phase I - Survey among ASPHER member schools, Phase II - Development of curriculum maps, Phase III - Consultation on curriculum content, Phase IV - Subject-specific surveys and analyses, Phase V - Expert advisory groups [14].

The new curricula will benefit all public health professionals.

CONCLUSION

Public health competencies must reflect the current changing situation in this field. The new challenges we face every day bring new stimuli for public health professionals who must be able to respond effectively and quickly to changing conditions. It is also essential to support preparedness for future cross-border threats to human health. The project of updating the core curriculum, which responds to challenges and reflects the "New normal" in public health, is a necessary condition for improving the quality of the public health workforce.

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