



Faculty of Public Health

of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

Developing Public Health Skills in Other Specialties

Background

Within the United Kingdom there are an increasing number of health-related issues that need to be addressed outside of direct healthcare interventions. Risks to the general health of the population have increased through direct external threats or through changes in lifestyle. We also need to ensure that the care provided to the public is of the highest standard.

These issues have been explicitly mentioned in Lord Darzi's report – a High Quality Workforce: NHS Next Stage Review. In particular Lord Darzi comments

In public health, there has been an unprecedented rise in expectations in what can be achieved. Obesity, drug and alcohol misuse, health inequalities and prevention of cancer and heart disease have the highest priority. We will address this by seeking to strengthen the numbers and skills of the public health workforce. We will also seek to encourage dual accreditation in public health and clinical specialties. This will enable doctors in clinical specialties, such as cardiology and diabetology, to become expert in prevention and health promotion.

The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) is in full support of this initiative to develop Public Health skills in the wider workforce. Outlined below are the main approaches being taken.

Overall Framework

FPH is working with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and with individual Colleges specifically to raise general knowledge and skills in Public Health areas. This includes excellent work undertaken over the years to include Public Health aspects within the Foundation Programme for all newly trained doctors. In addition, we are also actively engaged with the Academy working group on developing a Common Competencies Framework which will include a number of Public Health aspects. We are also working with other professions to develop a framework for Public Health practitioners.

In specific areas of specialist work we are collaborating with other Colleges to address Public Health aspects of their specialist areas. In particular this will address issues in relation to disease prevention and health improvement as outlined by Lord Darzi. This involves a process of developing a Public Health credential within that specialist area as discussed below.

Where appropriate it will also be important for some specialists to develop their expertise across the full range of Public Health specialist activity in addition to their clinical area. Where this is the most appropriate response to the needs of the community then full training in both specialties will be delivered through Dual Accreditation, discussed further below.

Modular Credentialing

This is an approach whereby specific skills and capabilities within a specified area of specialist practice are developed through a training programme. This is an approach proposed by Lord Darzi and fully supported by the Faculty. Obtaining a credential demonstrates that the individual has acquired the necessary knowledge and has demonstrated the skills and capabilities to work safely and competently in that defined area of practice. The credential is an essential assurance to both trainee and employer.

There are a number of areas within the broad field of Public Health which could be usefully developed as appropriate credentials for various clinical specialties. An example might be a general health protection credential for the clinical specialties dealing with infection. There might also be a credential concerned with emergency planning and responding to major incidents and events. A credential around health improvement and disease prevention could be appropriate for such specialties as cardiology, diabetes and respiratory medicine. Public Health skills and competencies concerning the planning and development of high quality services (eg. needs assessment, service evaluation, commissioning, etc) would be a suitable credential for a range of specialties, particularly those covering care-groups such as children, older people or people with disabilities.

Each credential would be clearly defined, with rigorous standards developed and assessed by the Faculty of Public Health in collaboration with the relevant other College/Faculty. It also requires cooperative work with the relevant regulator(s) to ensure that the module meets the needs of the UK and that any assessment framework is suitable.

Dual Accreditation

In some circumstances it is appropriate for a doctor to be accredited in two specialist areas. This normally requires them to undertake a full training programme in each specialty. However there might be common areas between the Public Health curriculum and the other specialty curriculum, in which case the Faculty would work with the other specialty and the relevant regulator to create a combined training programme that provides the full training effectively and efficiently. It will be important however to ensure that the standards of the two specialties are maintained in this combined training programme.

Capacity

The programme of work outlined above is extensive. Within the specialty of Public Health there are limited resources and the Faculty is currently working to prioritise which areas should be focused on initially and which would benefit from some reflection and later development. A number of strands are already being undertaken but the Faculty would welcome support from its membership where possible in taking this exciting area of work forward. We would also look to the input of human and other resources from those colleges/faculties with whom we are collaborating.

Useful documents

FPH statement on Next Stage Review – July 2008

http://www.fph.org.uk/advocacy/consultations/downloads/2008/DH_Next%20StageReview_0708.pdf

A high quality workforce: NHS Next Stage review -

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_085840

PH Curriculum - http://www.fph.org.uk/training/downloads/MASTER_PH_Curriculum.pdf

Assessment resources - <http://www.fph.org.uk/training/curriculum/assessment/guidance.asp>

David Williams

Academic Registrar [May 2009]