

“Bridging the Gap”: Response to health equity and prevention mandates in England’s 10-year Health Plan

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“Bridging the Gap” – a public health assignment to tackle health inequalities

The Public Health Team at the University of Sheffield Medical School created "Bridging the Gap," a new formative assignment for Phase 3a (3rd/4th year) medical students undertaken during their Community and Public Health Rotation. Replacing a rigid, essay-based format, this interactive assignment challenges small groups of students to address health disparities in Millfield, a fictional diverse UK neighbourhood. Students analyse health data, identify inequalities, and design health promotion interventions to prevent poor health. Groups present their work in any format—video, podcast, performance, or traditional presentation—followed by peer assessment with feedback.

The rotation's restructured curriculum supports this assignment with topics including health inequalities, health needs assessment, service evaluation, Making Every Contact Count, and health promotion/behaviour change. The new assignment aims to be engaging, practical, and insightful, helping students understand the challenges faced by our communities.

Key learning outcomes include: developing health data analysis skills; gaining practical intervention design experience; understanding social determinants of health; improving communication with diverse audiences; critically reflecting on healthcare professionals' roles in addressing disparities; and recognising the importance of health promotion, prevention, and their links to inequality.

Links to “Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England”

This assignment directly aligns with the "Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England," which mandates reducing health inequalities and shifting toward prevention and community-based care. By requiring students to identify high-risk populations, consider social determinants, and propose preventive interventions, the assignment develops competencies central to the Plan's proactive population health management approach. Its structure develops essential skills—data analysis, interprofessional communication, and stakeholder engagement—critical for driving reform under the Plan's vision of a devolved NHS and future-ready workforce. The assignment exemplifies how medical education is evolving to prepare students for system-level leadership and health equity challenges outlined in the national strategy.

Key outcomes / lessons learned

The shift from a rigid, essay-based format to "Bridging the Gap" yielded significant positive results, successfully achieving its aim of enhancing student engagement and creativity. Student feedback highlighted that the ability to use diverse formats—video, podcast, or performance—has encouraged a more dynamic, practical application of public health concepts. Students have reported that this interactive, team-based approach has fostered stronger interprofessional communication skills necessary for engaging with community audiences and peers.

Lessons learned focus on the logistical difficulties of implementing complex group work during intensive clinical rotations. Feedback highlighted that coordinating teams of 5-6 students became a "faff" due to different clinical schedules, making it challenging to ensure equal contribution. Furthermore, some groups found the task's complexity, specifically designing genuinely novel health promotion initiatives, difficult to execute. Future iterations should consider allocating more dedicated, protected time for collaboration and reducing team sizes to maximise practical insights without overwhelming students.

For further information, please contact:

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Phase 3a: Public Health, Health Inequalities and the Assessment

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