

PUBLIC AND MENTAL HEALTH

Josip Culig

Andrija Stampar Teaching Institute of Public Health, Zagreb, Croatia

* * * * *

A very first definition was published at the beginning of the last century: Public health is "the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, public and private, communities and individuals" (Winslow 1920). This statement was modified at the constitutive conference of the World Health Organization after the Second World War.

The dimensions of health can encompass "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity", as defined by the United Nations' World Health Organization (Preamble to the Constitution of the WHO 1946).

Public health incorporates the interdisciplinary approaches of epidemiology, pharmacoepidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health, community health, behavioral health, health economics, public policy, insurance medicine, occupational safety and health, and other health services. The focus of a public health intervention is to prevent and manage diseases, injuries and other health conditions through surveillance of cases and the promotion of healthy behaviors, communities and environments.

The three core public health functions are:

- The assessment and monitoring of the health of communities and populations at risk to identify health problems and priorities;
- The formulation of public policies designed to solve identified local and national health problems and priorities;
- To assure that all populations have access to appropriate and cost-effective care, including health promotion and disease prevention services, and evaluation of the effectiveness of that care.

Mental health is integral to overall health and well-being and should be treated with the same urgency as physical health. Mental illness can influence the onset, progression, and outcome of other illnesses and often correlates with health risk behaviors such as substance abuse, tobacco use, and physical inactivity. Depression has emerged as a risk factor for such chronic illnesses as hypertension, cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and can adversely affect the course and management of these conditions.

Treatment for mental disorders is available and effective. However, the majority of persons with diagnosed

mental disorders do not receive treatment. The challenges for public health are to identify risk factors, increase awareness about mental disorders and the effectiveness of treatment, remove the stigma associated with receiving treatment, eliminate health disparities, and improve access to mental health services for all persons, particularly among populations that are disproportionately affected. Public health agencies can incorporate mental health promotion into chronic disease prevention efforts, conduct surveillance and research to improve the evidence base about mental health in the countries, and collaborate with partners to develop comprehensive mental health plans to enhance coordination of care (Chapman et al. 2005).

Mental health care quality of life is often regarded in terms how it is negatively affected, on an individual level, by mental disorders. Mental health medicines work also on account of meanings, expectations, images and relationships. So, treatment effectiveness also depends on what patients believe how medications work and what is the nature of their problems as well as on their confidence in the physician and in the psychiatry as a whole (Jakovljevic et al. 2010)

Public health policy has a long history in Croatia

Dr Andrija Stampar, who was in 1945 one of key figures at the WHO first conference, founded School of Public Health in Zagreb in 1927. In the following years a whole network of public health organizations was erected across the country. Among them a prominent role is carried by *Public Health Institute* in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, which was founded in 1949 as a Hygiene Institute with preventive and intervention programs focused on the urban environment.

In 1961 Public Health Institute became a central public health organization in the city of Zagreb, with modern public health services as epidemiology, environmental health, health statistics, health public policy, occupational and sport medicine. In 1994 school medicine service was joined, after a while also mental health, cancer screening programs, aeroallergy, pharmacoepidemiology and gerontology center.

In 2008 Public Health Institute was named after public health pioneer in Croatia, „Dr. Andrija Stampar“. Finally in this 2014, in the year of the 65th anniversary, it is rewarded as *Teaching Institute* for University students in medicine, nursing, and other health sciences.

Vision and Mission

As one of the medical excellence centers in the Republic of Croatia our vision is to be the top public health institution in the region. Our mission is to provide services in the field of public health by acknowledging the highest standards of socially responsible behavior and science-based cognitions. Our goal is to offer our customers the reliability and quality based on the principles of medical excellence.

Andrija Stampar Teaching Institute of Public Health provides services in the field of public health, epidemiology, environmental health and health ecology, clinical microbiology, school and adolescent medicine, addiction prevention and mental health care. The Institute is also a teaching base of the University of Zagreb Medical School and Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek.

We are the collaborative teaching institution of the School of Medicine Rijeka, the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry Zagreb, the University of Applied Health Sciences Zagreb and the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica.

Within the Institution there are four Ministry of Health Reference Centers which confirm our leading role in the Croatian public health. Our main potential is based on a large number of top experts who work as university teachers and researchers in public health projects.

Science

Scientific Unit was formed in 2001 and consists of a multidisciplinary team of 30 scientists, 15 of them achieved the scientific title according the National procedure. The collaboration on different projects with scientists and institutions in Croatia and abroad is going on. This can be followed by a regular public activity in scientific and professional journals, books, textbooks and public health manuals. Since this 2014 is our 65th anniversary, we decided to celebrate it by issuing a special edition of *Psychiatria Danubina*. We express special thanks to Professor Miro Jakovljevic, the Chief editor, who encouraged us and supported us in every way.

Throughout the presented papers of our scientists and their collaborators from different institutions not

only do we want to emphasize the unity of public health (physical and mental), but also the need for a multidisciplinary approach to the research and what is more important, to build the solid ground for the different intervention programs in public health. For some time it was wrongly considered that mental health could not be a part of public health services but our institution proves that it is the must policy. Multi-disciplinary approach is the foundation of our excellence, which can be read from the selected articles that we present here. In this supplement, we choose to present the original researches on predictors of depressive symptoms in newborns, research on depression in adolescents, research on quality of life, on the consumption of psychotropic drugs, patients' adherence to prescribed therapy, but also on nursing evaluation on diabetes self-management, dry eye in contact lens wearers and the analytical findings of antibiotics in honey.

I am convinced that those who are engaged in public health research will find useful information, while those to whom public health is not a priority of scientific research will maybe find some new scientific challenges and ideas.

Acknowledgements: None.

Conflict of interest : None to declare.

References

1. Chapman DP, Perry SG & Strine TW: *The vital link between chronic disease and depressive disorders. Prev Chronic Dis* 2005; 2:A14.
2. Jakovljevic M, Tomic Z, Maslov B & Skoko I: *New image of psychiatry, mass media impact and public relations. Psychiatria Danubina* 2010; 22:145-148.
3. *Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.*
4. Winslow, Charles-Edward Amory: *The Untilled Fields of Public Health Science* 1920; 51:23–33. doi:10.1126/science.51.1306.23

Correspondence:

Prof. Josip Culig, MD, Ph.D.

Andrija Stampar Teaching Institute of Public Health

Mirogojska cesta 16, HR-10000 Zagreb, Croatia

E-mail: josip.culig@stampar.hr