

Maximising Population Health and Prevention in Healthcare Professionals' Curricula

Recommendations and areas for further research

Purpose

This work has generated a range of recommendations for maximising population health and prevention into Healthcare Professionals' curricula and areas for further research. This paper aims to share those findings with PRG members.

Recommendations

The undergraduate and postgraduate curricula play an important part in supporting the future health and care workforce to have the population health and prevention competencies to deliver the NHS Long Term Plan. However, this will not create change in isolation. A whole system approach to embedding population health and prevention within the workforce is needed with strong leadership for PHP throughout the system, including leaders of NHS providers, national strategic organisations, educators and professional organisations. There needs to be strong leadership for PHP within NHS settings at all levels, including clinical leadership.

Healthcare professionals need role models for PHP in practice. To enable this PHP competencies should be required and valued by employers, through recruitment, practice and through continuous development and career pathways in PHP. Whilst this work recognises these interdependencies, the guidance is limited to supporting educators to embed PHP in curricula.

To meet the expectations of the NHS Long Term Plan, population health and prevention needs to be strengthened and continue to be mandated by the regulators. Regulators may find it interesting to note the range and breadth of PHP within different healthcare professionals. There may opportunities for shared learning from comparing the standards and acknowledging similarities and differences, as well as learning from potential different approaches taken to develop these standards.

HEIs curricula responds to the requirements of the regulators but also to the employer market. Employing organisations such as NHS Trusts, practices and pharmacies have a clear influence on the type of healthcare professionals they want to employ. If job descriptions are explicit with aspects of PHP, then progressive HEIs will want to respond to the market accordingly. A strategic approach addressing this issue should run concurrently to the implementation of the guidance amongst educators.

The scope of this project requires the guidance to be broad and generic to support all educators to build some generic PHP into training. Further work may be required to address more specific elements of PHP.

Stakeholders have expressed that much guidance is produced by national bodies in the NHS. However, further support is required to implement this guidance. A clear implementation plan should be developed alongside this guidance. This should include a communications and dissemination plan, monitoring and testing to refine and improve it, and gather further examples of emerging practice. There should also be an evaluation of the impact of the guidance. Evaluation of the process of implementation would enable learning that could be applied to other programmes seeking to change practice across healthcare professionals.

Stakeholders have expressed the desire for some specific resources, including a single repository for the sharing of innovation and ideas. This would benefit from being interactive so that educators could shape and contribute to it and keep it live and relevant.

Some existing networks for educators have been identified related to PHP, specifically the Medical School Educators in Public Health and Regional Public Health Training networks. Stakeholders have expressed they would welcome networking around PHP. There may be an opportunity to increase awareness of these networks or develop wider networks for those educators who do not see population health and prevention as their primary focus. These networks may consider how they might test and better utilize existing cascade systems for disseminating information to frontline educators.

Areas for further research

Further research is required to evaluate the impact of embedding PHP in undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. This includes the impact on student learning, satisfaction and practice; the impact for educators in terms, including their perceptions of the importance of PHP, confidence and practice, both as an educator and where appropriate in clinical practice. Finally, there is a lack of research on the impact of this for patients or service users. Whilst this may be challenging to measure, it is important to remember that the reason for embedding PHP into healthcare professionals practice is to improve NHS services, and therefore the impact on patient satisfaction, and on outcomes at both a clinical population level are important to assess.

Further research would be helpful to explore whether the standards set by the regulators are those that lead to the changes in the workforce required in the NHS Long Term Plan. This work has identified differences in requirements between professional groups and there does not appear to be a common framework against which regulators have compared the professional groups, to identify which standards are relevant for each group. Further research is required to identify whether this matters, and whether there are standards that are missing or irrelevant for some professional groups.

The peer-reviewed evidence identified for inter-professional learning comes from the USA which has a very different healthcare system to the UK, so lessons may not necessarily be

generalisable to the UK. Stakeholder interviews from this work suggest that inter-professional learning is perceived positively. However further research to clarify the impact of this on patient outcomes, as well as research to capture the challenges and impact for educators would be helpful.

Further research is suggested to develop and gather examples of population health and prevention assessments. These need to be practical and easy for educators to use and mark. This means they must be scalable, to be used for large groups of inter-disciplinary students and marked rapidly so that the burden of assessment is realistic for educators.

The literature review identified a gap in understanding 'how' students learn crucial public health concepts. More research is required on the effectiveness of different approaches to public health education and the issues and challenges learners face in embedding PHP, from the student perspective.