

Training the next generation of global health leaders in the Pacific Rim

Global health is the term applied to a rapidly growing area of research, training, and application of public health approaches on a global scale. The solutions to current and future global health problems will require a highly-trained, inter-disciplinary global health workforce from various sectors and disciplines. Global health education and research can potentially have long-range impact in addressing the global burden of disease and protecting and improving the health of our global population. Through an online survey, twelve universities from Australia, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, the United States, and Vietnam provided programmatic and student data on 41 postgraduate programs in public health, including five programs specific to global health.

A growing demand for global health education was evident in our findings. Our results demonstrated that enrollment in global health programs increased by 351% between 2005-2011 among the universities included in our study. However, very few schools had established dedicated departments or centers of global health. The proliferation and the diversity of global health education programs in the Pacific Rim suggest that universities should meet the growing demand for global health education by offering more programs and degrees focused specifically on global health. Combined degree programs with a global health track, concentration or specialization, such as MD/PhD and MD/MPH programs, could help meet the demand for global health training in multidisciplinary programs. Institutions that do not have schools of public health should consider incorporating global health courses into existing degree programs, such as medical degrees. In addition, by offering certificate programs in public health, particularly global health, students could pursue training in global health without participating in full public health degree programs. Universities that already offer general public health degrees could add courses in global health to allow students to broaden their training into global health. And increasing the number of dedicated global health research institutions would contribute to building research capacity in the region and build an increasing body of research.

We acknowledge that universities may face several challenges in terms of meeting the demand for global health education. For example, very few programs in our study offered undergraduate courses in global health. Exposing undergraduates to global health courses may help spark students' interest in global health early in their academic careers and encourage them to pursue graduate training and careers in public health. Diversity within schools in terms of programs and disciplines can promote training in public health at many levels. One important challenge is the lack of teaching capacity in global health, especially in the smaller programs. Therefore, universities are encouraged to involve faculty from different departments and disciplines in providing global health education. Courses from a variety of disciplines should be offered, such as courses in medical anthropology, health economics, environmental health, psychology, demography and global health diplomacy. And while globalization has brought challenges for health, it has also brought new ways

to collaborate in education. New, more flexible models of learning, such as distance learning and experiential learning opportunities, can also meet the demand for more global health courses. However, we also recommend that core competencies in global health are established to ensure comparable training across programs and nations.

In conclusion, the growing demand for global health education suggests that universities should increase educational and training opportunities in this field. Faculty from different departments and disciplines need to be involved in providing global health educational opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Training a competent global health workforce will help to reduce the current global burden of disease in the Pacific Rim, build capacity to tackle current emerging health threats, and help set long-term global health priorities.

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