

Report on the AFMC Task Group on Public Health and AFMC Public Health Educators' Network March, 2008

Executive Summary:

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the main activities of both groups to the AFMC Board of Directors for their meeting at the 2008 Canadian Conference on Medical Education (CCME) in Montréal.

Main Points:

- *Best Practices in Public Health Education.* Due to the paucity of evidence on the best practices in public health education, the AFMC Task Group has contracted an environmental scan, including a literature search and interviews on the best practices in teaching public health. The work is presently on-going and a report to the Task Group is anticipated in May.
- *Future academic career paths for public health physicians.* The AFMC Task Group remains concerned about the need to improve academic career paths for public health physicians and the need to ensure that educational programs are taught by persons with the required expertise.
- *Creation of student public health interest groups.* Using the existing PHAC grant, 12 proposals were accepted for the 2 years of funding. It is hoped that students at the other 5 schools will submit proposals this coming academic year.
- *Active participation in the PHEN.* In 2007/8, the PHEN had two meetings. At each meeting, 16 of the 17 medical schools were able to send a representative. The school not able to attend varied by each meeting and, in each situation, it was simply due to scheduling issues. Overall, the discussion of the members indicated that they valued mutual support, felt they were making progress and thus wanted to continue.
- *Agreement on educational objectives for public health.* The draft educational objectives, which had been developed by the AFMC Task Group and approved by the Council of Deans, were submitted to the Medical Council of Canada (MCC). In January 2008, the MCC approved the revised objectives as submitted.

- *Development of a repository of public health educational resources.* After a scan of educational resources, a review of the educational programs at the 17 medical schools and of their Public Health teaching resources, a report was presented to the PHEN members in March, 2008. It anticipated that the repository will be functional in the next year.
- *Development of a "Primer on Public Health".* The scan of educational resources revealed that there was no one accepted textbook or resource guide in the area of public health. As a result, the PHEN wants to create a web-based primer in Public Health, a first draft of which should be ready by March 2009.
- *Participation / response to the external environment.* The PHEN has contributed to responses to two major initiatives.
 1. Ian Johnson, as chair of the PHEN, was invited to submit an article to the peer review process of the journal *Academic Medicine* on the status of public health education in Canada. With the assistance of the other members of the PHEN executive (Jean Parboosingh and Denise Donovan), this article was submitted and accepted for publication. The article will be published this coming spring.
 2. The second request for a submission came from the Université de Montréal / University of Toronto consortium that has been contracted to produce an environmental scan for the AFMC Future of Medical Education project. The consortium asked for a report on the topic of teaching public health. As above, the PHEN executive responded and submitted a paper according to the specifications provided.

Conclusion:

The AFMC Task Group in Public Health (strategic planning group) and the AFMC Public Health Education Network (doers) are on track with our strategic plan, taking on specific roles of refining the objectives, developing and sharing resources, and addressing specific requests as they come forward. The overall agendas of both groups are moving forward well. The results will integrate well together and contribute to the improved teaching of public health. Both groups want to acknowledge the support provided by the AFMC staff, in particular, Barbie Shore and Sue Maskill. Both groups also want to recognize and thank the Public Health Agency of Canada for their on-going and continued support of these educational initiatives.

Report on the AFMC Task Group on Public Health and AFMC Public Health Educators' Network March, 2008

Submitted by Ian Johnson (Chair of AFMC Task Group on Public Health and AFMC Public Health Educators' Network)

Background:

The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC) initiated the social accountability program in 2002. At this time, Public Health was identified as one of the priorities. The AFMC Task Group on Public Health, created in 2003, became the main driving force of this initiative creating a report entitled "*Enhancing the Health of the Population: The Role of Canadian Faculties of Medicine, A Vision Paper Presented to the Council of Deans of Faculties of Medicine*" in 2006. Following acceptance of this paper by the deans of medicine, a successful funding proposal was submitted to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). This funding proposal had seven major objectives as outlined in appendix 1. The funding is granted on a year-to-year basis and was requested for the 5 years, 2007 through 2011. A list of the current members of the AFMC Task Group on Public Health is provided in Appendix 2. With this funding, the AFMC Task Group on Public Health created a network consisting of one representative from each of the 17 faculties of medicine. A list of the network members is appended as Appendix 3.

Purpose of this report.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the main activities of both groups to the AFMC Board of Directors for their meeting at the 2008 CCME in Montréal. Under the assumption that the Council of Deans has a very full agenda, no formal meeting is requested. However, representation and attendance at the meeting is certainly welcomed, if requested by the Council of Deans.

Activities and main outcomes of the AFMC Task Group on Public Health.

With the creation of the Educators' Network in 2007, the activities of the AFMC Task Group have been reduced. Discussion of materials via e-mail and the holding of teleconferences have replaced face-to-face meetings. This being said, the Task Group has been active in 2 major areas:

- *Best Practices in Public Health Education.*

The Task Group is concerned that there is very little documented evidence on the best practices in public health education. This is coupled with documented variation in the methods being used by various faculties of medicine across Canada. In collaboration with the PHAC, the AFMC Task Group made a request for proposals for doing an environmental scan, including a literature search on the best practices in teaching public health. They also asked the consultants to document through interviews what activities Canadian public health educators believe are most effective in teaching public health to medical students. Up to six interviews will also be conducted with international programs identified as having possible best practices. Using a competitive bidding process, the Nevis Group was awarded the contract. This group has extensive experience in doing contract work with the PHAC on public health issues and added Dr. Robert Spasoff (Professor Emeritus at the University of Ottawa), and Dr. Ingrid Tyler (University of Toronto) to their research team for this project. The work is presently on-going and a report is anticipated in May. A meeting of the Task Group is being scheduled to review this report in May/June when it has been received and then make recommendations in consultation with the PHEN and medical students. The recommendations will be made to the deans of medicine.

- *Future academic career paths for public health physicians.*

The Task Group remains concerned about the future career paths for public health physicians, particularly with respect to pursuing an academic career. This is important from the perspective of having public health taught by experts in the field and in demonstrating that an academic career path is possible for new graduates. While such career opportunities are possible in some schools, the number of such positions is low and needs to be enhanced.

- *Creation of student public health interest groups.* Using the PHAC funding, the Task Group put out a call for proposals for the creation of public health interest groups. While we had originally planned for 8-9 such groups, the Task Group received 12 applications for the creation of such groups (1 per medical school at 12 of the 17 medical schools). Using the membership of the PHEN to review the proposals, all 12 were accepted for the 2 years of funding. It is anticipated that students at the other 5 schools will submit proposals for this coming academic year. A list of the funded interest groups is provided in Appendix 4.

Activities and main outcomes of the AFMC Public Health Educators' Network (PHEN).

In comparison to the activities of the AFMC Task Group, the activities of the Public Health Educators' Network have increased. Two face-to-face meetings were held in the 2007/8 fiscal year. Discussion of materials via e-mail was also done frequently. The major activities of the task Group are listed below. It should be noted that the emphasis remains on undergraduate medical education and work on post-graduate education will likely not begin until 2009.

- *Active participation in the PHEN.* It is one thing to create a network, it is another to gain collaboration and make it work. In 2007/8, the PHEN had two meetings. At each meeting, 16 of the 17 medical schools were able to send a representative. The school not able to attend varied by each meeting and, in each situation, it was simply due to scheduling issues. Overall, the discussion of the members indicated that they valued mutual support, felt they were making progress and thus wanted to continue.
 - *Next steps:* continue with meetings and collaborative approaches.
- *Agreement on educational objectives for public health.* The draft educational objectives, which had been developed by the AFMC Task Group and approved by the Council of Deans, were reviewed and modified by the PHEN. These modifications related mainly to enhancing the clarity of the objectives and re-organizing the flow of the document. Agreement was achieved on all areas

save for the one on “health of special populations”. The previous objectives had been submitted to the Medical Council of Canada (MCC) so these modifications were forwarded to the MCC. In January 2008, the MCC approved the revised objectives as submitted. These educational objectives are now published on the MCC website (www.mcc.ca/english/publications/exam_objectives.html).

- *Next steps.* The PHEN members are very pleased that the educational objectives on population health were accepted verbatim by the MCC. However, they remain concerned that the objective on the health of special populations needs more refinement, particularly with respect to the health of Aboriginal peoples. Hence, representatives of the PHEN will meet with the AFMC Task Group on Aboriginal Health to further explore how to proceed in this area.
 - *Development of a repository of public health educational resources.* A scan of educational resources was done at the PHEN meeting in June, 2007. Due to the complexity and variety of approaches, a call for proposals to create the inventory was held. Denise Donovan (from Université de Sherbrooke) was awarded this contract. Denise reviewed the educational programs at the 17 medical schools and reviewed many of the resources that were provided. A copy of her report is attached as Appendix 5. Her final report was presented to the PHEN members in March, 2008.
 - *Next Steps:* The work done by Denise will be further refined by each of the PHEN members before it is uploaded into a repository on the AFMC website. It is hoped that the initial pilot web-based repository will be available in August 2008.
- The PHEN has also used its collective buying power to support the creation of the educational board game - “The Last Straw” - on the determinants of health. This innovative game was created at the University of Toronto by Kate Rossiter and Kate Reeve and piloted at McMaster. It has been positively reviewed by many of the PHEN members. Due to collective action, the PHEN has been able to secure additional copies of this resource in a cost-effective fashion for more extensive use this coming fall.

- *Development of a "Primer on Public Health"*. A scan of educational resources revealed that there was no one accepted textbook or resource guide in the area of public health. Several texts were excellent in their own right but they did not meet the needs of medical students. As a result, the PHEN wants to create a web-based document that could serve as a common resource for all 17 medical schools and possibly other disciplines (e.g. nursing, physiotherapy, etc.) as well. Creation of this document will also lead to discussion on important concepts such as depth of coverage (i.e. what is the minimum level of detail to be covered for each objective).
 - *Next Steps*: The PHEN has agreed on the vision of the document, overall table of contents, and a process for creation of the primer. All medical schools will be involved. The goal is to have the first draft of the primer ready by March 2009.
- *Participation / response to the external environment*. The PHEN has contributed to responses to two major initiatives. They have also offered to participate in a variety of forums. The highlights are given below.

The first initiative is that Ian Johnson, as chair of the PHEN, was invited to submit an article to the peer review process of the journal *Academic Medicine* on the status of public health education in Canada. With the assistance of the other members of the PHEN executive (Jean Parboosingh and Denise Donovan), this article was submitted and accepted for publication. The article will be published this coming spring.

The second request for a submission came from the Université de Montréal / University of Toronto consortium that has been contracted to produce an environmental scan for the AFMC Future of Medical Education project. The consortium asked for a report on the topic of teaching public health. As above, the PHEN executive responded and submitted a paper according to the specifications provided.

The PHEN sought to increase participation in the CCME in Montréal this May by trying to coordinate the creation of a facilitated poster session on public health education. While the dedicated session was not possible, 5 poster presentations

were accepted. This indicates the degree to which the teaching of public health relates to other areas of medical education. The PHEN will again try for a dedicated facilitated poster session at the 2009 AFMC conference.

Other responses include maintaining contact with the public health initiatives of the Association of American Medical Colleges (Ian Johnson, U of T) and presenting at federal/provincial and territorial government meetings (Richard Mathias, UBC)

- *Next Steps:* The PHEN Executive will participate and respond to requests as appropriate.

- *Faculty development.* Having sufficient well trained faculty to deliver a public health curriculum is a challenge. In the 2008/9 fiscal year, the PHEN wishes to start to address methods to support faculty by improving the faculty development process.

Conclusion:

The AFMC Task Group in Public Health remains the strategic planning group that provides overall direction to this initiative. They have taken on specific valuable roles in supporting the creation of public health student interest groups and in supporting the creation of a document that outlines the best practices in public health education.

The AFMC Public Health Education Network has taken on the more specific roles of refining the objectives, developing and sharing resources, and addressing specific requests as they come forward.

The overall agendas of both are moving forward well. The results will integrate well together and contribute to the improved teaching of public health.

Both groups want to acknowledge the support provided by the AFMC staff, in particular, Barbie Shore and Sue Maskill. Both groups also want to recognize and thank the Public Health Agency of Canada for their on-going and continued support of these educational initiatives.

Appendix 1. Objectives of the Contribution Agreement between the Public Health Agency of Canada and the AFMC.

1. To develop a national undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) medicine curriculum framework based on public health competencies.
2. To influence policy change regarding examination and accreditation standards.
3. To develop and work with a network across the Faculties of Medicine in Canada so as to support their public health faculty.
4. To develop a resource repository of educational materials applicable to undergraduate and post-graduate medical education.
5. To develop a public health faculty development framework for teachers.
6. To pilot public health student interest groups in 17 faculties of medicine.
7. To increase student interest in choosing community medicine.
 - a. Encourage best practices in public health education in medicine.

Expected Results at End of Project

1. Enhanced public health education for UG and PG students,
2. Enhanced public health teaching capacity,
3. Increased number of public health student interest groups, and
4. Increased interest in student participation in community residency programs.

Appendix 2. Membership of the AFMC Task Group on Public Health.

Members: (in alphabetical order)

Ian Bowmer (Medical Council of Canada)

Denise Donovan (Universite de Sherbrooke)

Isra Levy* (Ottawa- Carleton Public Health Department – former consultant with the Canadian Medical Association)

Jamie Hockin (Public Health Agency of Canada)

Ian Johnson (University of Toronto) - Chair

Sue Maskill (AFMC)

David Mowat* (Peel Health Unit – former Deputy Director, Public Health Agency of Canada)

Richard Musto (National Specialty Society of Community Medicine, Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons)

Jean Parboosingh (Consultant AFMC)

Alain Pavalanis (College of Family Physicians of Canada)

Andrew Pinto (Community Medicine Resident)

Christine Rajic (Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing)

Joan Sayers (Consumers Association of Canada)

* Both Dr. Levy and Dr. Mowat have changed affiliation and no longer represent their former agencies. Due to their interest and commitment, they were invited to continue to participate and both have agreed to do so. We thank them for their dedication to the goals of the Task Group. Dr. Hockin has replaced Dr. Mowat as the PHAC representative and we are currently creating a link with the Canadian Medical Association.

Appendix 3. Membership of the AFMC Public Health Educators' Network (PHEN).

Members: (in alphabetical order)

Catherine Donovan – Memorial University

Denise Donovan – Université de Sherbrooke

Julie Emili – McMaster University

Vera Etches - Northern Ontario School of Medicine

Bruce Holmes – Dalhousie University

Duncan Hunter – Queen's University

Jean Paul Fortin – Université de Laval

Ian Johnson - University of Toronto - Chair

Joel Kettner – University of Manitoba

Brigitte Maheux – Université de Montreal

Susan Maskill – V.P. Education & Special Projects AFMC

Richard Mathias – University of British Columbia

Ian McDowell – Ottawa University

Laura McLeod - University of Calgary

Gilles Paradis – McGill University

Jean Parboosingh – Consultant AFMC

Bruce Reeder – University of Saskatchewan

Barbie Shore – Project Manager AFMC

Mark Speechley – University of Western Ontario

Jim Talbot – University of Alberta

Appendix 4. List of Public Health Student Interest Groups funded in 2007/8.

Université de Sherbrooke

Northern Ontario School of Medicine

Dalhousie University

Queen's University

University of Toronto

University of Manitoba

University of British Columbia

Ottawa University

University of Calgary

McGill University

University of Saskatchewan

University of Alberta

Appendix 5. Summary of REPOSITORY OF PUBLIC HEALTH LEARNING RESOURCES: FINAL REPORT

The following is a summary of the final report of work carried out by Denise Donovan of the Université de Sherbrooke under a contract with the Public Health Educators Network (PHEN), via the Association of Faculties of Canada (AFMC). The report was reduced to the main points in the interests of brevity in reporting to the deans. A full copy of the report can be obtained from each school's member of the PHEN.

Work completed

Following the terms of the contract, the following work was carried out:

- (1) Review the undergraduate public health course outlines and existing learning resources that were submitted by the 17 Canadian medical schools. Course outlines and learning resources were mapped to the public health learning objectives approved by the PHEN in order to identify gaps.
- (2) A database of the learning resources has been prepared. It includes a brief description of each resource. It is searchable by objective and type of resource and will shortly be ready for incorporation into a web based programme.
- (3) The report of the work was presented to the March 2008 PHEN meeting when the draft outline for an *Undergraduate Medical Student Primer on Public Health* was discussed.

The review confirmed the diversity of courses, materials and objectives covered, although some of the variations noted may be due to the variety of perspectives from which course outlines are written and the level of detail they contain.

Public health teaching: situation in the curriculum and methods used

- Most public health courses stand alone separated from other teaching or are grouped with other subjects, such as ethics and professionalism, that are not traditionally seen to be directly related to clinical teaching. Linking the teaching of Public Health to that of clinical aspects of medicine is variable, although some medical schools use rural and family medicine placements to demonstrate the links between the two.
- Teaching time devoted to Public Health would appear very variable. However, the different teaching methods used and the differences in grouping of subjects taught make comparisons unreliable.
- A variety of resources are used. There is no generally accepted textbook. Grey literature gleaned from Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and from Provincial health and public health authorities are commonly used. Many schools have developed teaching tools, such as a

board game, quizzes, case scenarios etc. as a means of stimulating discussion among students. Schools using problem-based learning approaches have developed a variety of problems and have identified relevant references.

Coverage of Public Health learning objectives

Review of course outlines revealed that overall the courses cover all the major domains of the Public Health objectives adopted by the PHEN. Details of coverage seem to vary but this may be due to the variations in perspective of courses, in the level of detail, and in the distribution of learning objectives throughout the curriculum. Two points stand out from the review:

- Clinical preventive practice versus Public Health principles. Public health teaching perspectives diverge along this axis. Some schools emphasize clinical preventive interventions in their public health courses while others explore more general Public Health concepts including the social, organisational and quantitative aspects of medicine.
- Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. In general, secondary prevention, beyond well-person screening, and tertiary prevention are held to be the domain of clinical medicine. However, the organisation of services to facilitate secondary and tertiary prevention can fall into the Public Health domain. This boundary issue is reflected in the perspectives of the different medical schools' Public Health course outlines, some of which address tertiary prevention while others are limited to primary prevention and health promotion.