

LETTERS

APPLIED PUBLIC HEALTH TRAINING: A GRADUATE'S PERSPECTIVE

I was pleased to see Fried et al.¹ make the case for a new era of graduate public health curriculum focused on integrated, problem-based learning and the companion article by Begg et al.² describe the new MPH curriculum at Columbia University as a model for an integrated, problem-based curriculum. Graduate public health training needs to adapt to new models to adequately prepare the next generation of public health leaders to effectively manage the complex public health problems of the present.

The Community Oriented Public Health Practice (COPHP) program at the University of Washington in Seattle is built on similar foundations as Columbia's new curriculum and has more than 10 years of experience in using problem-based cases to teach a full two-year curriculum that integrates applied learning experiences while teaching technical skills and critical thinking. Cases are designed with community-based partner organizations, so that students seek and share knowledge, integrate content, build skills, work in teams, and communicate results. By the time students

graduate from the COPHP program, they have addressed more than 250 learning objectives through four dozen cases. Students produce real deliverables for organizational clients (as compared with simulated experiences often used in traditional training programs); for example, they have written several policy position statements adopted by the American Public Health Association, they have designed health department communications plans for public health emergencies, and they designed the evaluation for Seattle's new ordinance requiring all employers to provide sick leave. These applied experiences offer COPHP students opportunities to work in small groups to effectively solve problems, develop nonpositional leadership skills, and meet expectations of project directors, communities, and other partners. The constant opportunity to learn from community partners throughout the program also reinforces a commitment to health equity and bringing a social justice perspective to the practice of public health.

As a graduate of the COPHP program currently working in public health practice, I see the value of my applied graduate training every day. Through COPHP, I developed skills of real-world problem solving, the confidence to embrace the complexity of the field, and the ability to lead both peers and superiors through collaborative tasks. I commend Columbia's reenvisioned approach and its commitment to workforce development for the field. More schools of public health should move forward on curriculum development to bring content to life. The University of Washington's COPHP program is another example of much-needed, integrated, problem-based training for the public health workforce. ■

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Under mounting pressure from charities and senior physicians, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization has agreed to adopt the Bexsero vaccine against meningitis B, after rejecting it last year. Clinicians had written to Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt urging him to adopt the vaccine as a way of protecting young children, in particular, from the disease. Photograph by Danny Lawson. Printed with permission of AP Images.

(e-mail: tegan.callahan@gmail.com). Reprints can be ordered at <http://www.ajph.org> by clicking the "Reprints" link.

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2. Begg MW, Galea S, Bayer R, Walker JR, Fried LP. MPH education for the 21st century: design of Columbia University's new public health curriculum. *Am J Public Health*. 2014;104(1):30–36.

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