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The link between Going International and the Department of Tropical Hygiene and Public Health at the University Clinic of Heidelberg

Abstract:

Gesundheitsprobleme im globalen Kontext haben in den vergangenen Jahren wieder höhere Beachtung gefunden, insbesondere durch die weltweite HIV Pandemie. Auch in Bezug auf andere Fragestellungen stehen Gesundheitssysteme weltweit vor neuen Herausforderungen wie z.B. dem epidemiologischen und demographischen Wandel. An der Abteilung für Tropenhygiene und Öffentliches Gesundheitswesen des Universitätsklinikums Heidelberg sind diese Herausforderungen Gegenstand von Dienstleistung, Forschung und Lehre. Seit vielen Jahren hat die Abteilung insbesondere im Bereich der Lehre ein breit gefächertes Angebot zur Qualifizierung und Weiterbildung in Fragen der internationalen Gesundheit aufgebaut, in dessen Mittelpunkt ein Masterprogramm steht. Ergänzt wird es von Kursen und Kursen zur speziellen Vorbereitung für Gesundheitspersonal, das in wirtschaftlich armen Ländern im Rahmen der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit zum Einsatz kommen soll.

There has been renewed global interest in health-related issues particularly in relation to the HIV pandemic. However health systems around the world also face a number of other challenges such as epidemiological and demographic change. The department of Tropical Hygiene and Public Health at the University Hospital of Heidelberg addresses these challenges through direct services, research and teaching. Particularly with regard to teaching the department has for a number of years, developed a broad range of teaching activities in the context of International Health. The Master in International Health Programme is at the centre of these activities and is supplemented by a number of short courses and specific preparatory courses for health personnel intending to work in resource constraint settings.

The Context

Over the past couple of years there has been a renewed interest in health as many health systems in the –world, independent of the level development of the country, face serious challenges to adapt to new demands in coping with demographic and epidemiological changes such as mental health, emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, environmental changes and financing of health systems, to highlight just a few.

Health has also come back into the spotlight on a development level since the report of the WHO Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, which describes the dialectic relation between economical growth and health. Economical growth fosters health, but a good health status of the population is a prerequisite for economic gains. And health in economically poor countries with poorly functioning health system is particularly threatened when coupled with a high HIV prevalence on top of other existing epidemics from tropical diseases. This problem has been addressed by the United Nations Special Summit on HIV AIDS and since then, the landscape of main players in the arena of global health has also seen a dramatic change with new international bodies such as the Global Fund to fight AIDS Malaria and Tuberculosis, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and large NGOs like MSF to name only a few. Three of the 8 Millennium development goals directly address health related problems and others indirectly involve health. New approaches, new agencies and new technologies, all need people who are knowledgeable about these issues, yet it is estimated that there is a lack of around 4 million health workers worldwide. New opportunities are arising both for voluntary work and for career development in the field of International Public Health, in NGOs, International Agencies or faith based organisations.

The Department of Tropical Hygiene and Public Health at University Clinic Heidelberg

The training of medical personnel and postgraduates of other disciplines -, along with the Heidelberg undergraduates, - in relation to international public health has been at the heart of the Department of Tropical Hygiene and Public Health at the University Clinic of Heidelberg University since its foundation in 1962. The Department offers a variety of courses which reflect the broad range of international health issues as discussed above. These courses are predominantly held in English, but also in German.

Since its foundation, the Department "Tropenhygiene und öffentliches Gesundheitswesen" has experienced considerable growth. It currently has a staff of about 60, which includes the chair, two additional full professors (C3 and APL), three assistant professors (scientists with 'habilitation'), research associates, support staff (lab technicians, managers and staff assistants) and a varying number of visiting scholars, post doctoral fellows and doctoral students.

The Department of Tropical Hygiene and Public Health is one of five departments within the Institute of Hygiene, the other four being: Hygiene und Medical Microbiology, Parasitology, Virology and Molecular Virology. It is part of the Medical School/Medical faculty which in turn is part of the University of Heidelberg. The Department receives public core funding, however, more than half of its funds are competitively acquired for research and teaching activities. The department's mission is to contribute to the improvement of health through research, teaching and

direct services (patient care, consulting) in developing countries and at home.

The Teaching Programme

Based on the best available evidence the department addresses inequalities in health through research and teaching and direct services. The department is proud to host students with medical and non medical backgrounds from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe plus a few from the Americas.

Master in International Health

We offer a Master Degree Course in International Health (MScIH). This programme has derived from our former Master of Science Programme in Community Health and Health Management. This Master programme has been run successfully for more than a decade.

By 2005, 289 students had graduated from this programme. A statistical overview (based on the time period of 1995 – 2005) shows that we achieved our aim of multidisciplinary, internationality, and gender balance to a large extent (female /male ratio 51 / 49 %).

REGION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Europe (incl. Eastern Europe and NIS)	31 (16 %)
Sub Saharan Africa	81 (41 %)
Middle East	8 (4 %)
Asia (incl. Central Asian Countries)	64 (33 %)
Latin- and Southern America	13 (7%)

PROFESSION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Medical Doctor	133 (67%)
Other health professionals	32 (16%)
Social Scientists	11 (6%)
Managerial and administrative professionals	6 (3%)
Others	15 (8%)

The overall aim of the new MSc IH is to provide students with a solid foundation in international public health principles and with competency in using the tools and methods necessary to initiate and run programmes that improve the health of poor populations in an efficient, sustainable and equitable way.

Master students have the option to choose between a full time one year course of study or to complete the Master part time in up to 5 years. Both options are taken as a modular format, starting with a 3 months core course followed by advanced modules. Course titles are for example: Consultancy Skills in International Cooperation in Health Part I and II; Health and Human Rights; Health of Unstable Populations; Medical Anthropology as a tool for Public Health; Quality Management in International Health

Part time students have the opportunity to take these advanced modules at over 30 partner institutions within the tropEd network. The usually 2 week long advanced module courses can also be attended as “stand alone” courses for continuing professional education.

For more details you can access the department’s website www.ukl-hd.de/athoeg under the heading “teaching”.

Certificate Courses

The department specifically provides courses for health staff who want to work abroad. For more than 20 years the department has been commissioned through the Federal Ministry of Development and Economical Cooperation and in collaboration with the German governmental and faith based developmental agencies to conduct these courses to prepare health staff for work in resource-poor settings. The courses are also recommended by MSF for the preparation of their volunteers. These are taught in German and are called “Gesundheitsversorgung in Entwicklungsländern” (Health Care in Developing Countries) (5 weeks) and “Multisektorale Arbeit in HIV” (Multi-sectoral work in HIV)(2 weeks).

Upon completion of the course the participants will have a solid basis to be able to contribute in the field of health in development, in either clinical, managerial or educational capacities for example depending on their professional background. Courses are offered twice a year for a maximum of 25 people. Participants come mainly from Germany but also from Austria and Switzerland. Most of them have a medical, nursing or midwifery background, and a few come from other professions like physiotherapy or occupational therapy or pharmacy. Many participants take these preparatory courses as the starting point for their interest and career development in International Health. (www.klinikum.uni-heidelberg.de/entwicklungshelferkurse) Many of those responsible and active in the field of Health in International Development in Germany today (at Ministry level or at GTZ, DED, KfW) have started off in one of the certificate courses.

The department also offers seminars for foreign medical students in Germany in collaboration with the German Academic Exchange Programme. The topics mainly address health problems that are more prevalent and of higher importance in low and middle income countries or in countries with tropical diseases.

Teaching Staff

Teaching staff – both internal and external- for all courses combine theoretical knowledge, research and rich field experience and come from Germany and abroad. Teaching methods include a variety of methods in group work, lecturing and self study. The atmosphere in teaching and studying is based on a collegial understanding for the students with their specific pre-existing knowledge and experiences.

Future developments

Currently plans are underway to further develop the profile of international health within Heidelberg University as it wants to establish a Graduate School for International Public Health (www.griph.de).

Taking courses in Heidelberg - with its historic and contemporary academic environment, the romantic old town, the Neckar valley and the other surroundings, provides a unique experience of Germany shared with students and lecturers from around the world.

Contacts

For further and detailed information please visit the website or call the coordinators' offices.

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