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TropEd – A European Network for International Health Training

Studying in an international network has become a reality : since 1998 health professionals from all over Europe have had the opportunity to obtain a “Master of International Health” by means of a module-based program offered jointly by 27 European institutions. The mobility of students is an integral part of the program. To obtain their degree students have to study at least at two institutions in two different countries. For the students this means more organisational efforts but they benefit from the experience and expertise of two different institutions and learn how to integrate their own experience into different learning environments.

The “International Health” degree focuses on the strategies of a modern public health approach which takes particular account of the special needs of countries with limited resources (i.e. “classic” developing countries, countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia). The “International Health” degree encourages interdisciplinary thinking and acting and unites the knowledge and experience of different disciplines, such as epidemiology, social sciences, medicine, economics, management, ethnology, biology or demography. First and foremost the program wants to convey how the interaction of disciplines, by means of critical analysis of the current state of health of a population, of scientifically founded resource management and of targeted project-planning and intervention strategies, can guarantee a successful primary health care for the population in question.

On the one hand the program aims at health professionals from developing countries and other countries with limited resources and on the other hand at European physicians, nursing personnel, health scientists, biologists, psychologists, pedagogues, pharmacists, health managers, etc. who are preparing for a mission in a developing country. The program also takes account of the fact that ever more international organizations (WHO, other UN bodies, the World Bank, etc.), NGOs or other humanitarian aid organizations need skilled staff with formal training in international health.

The Master’s degree in International Health is a module-based program. It is a one-year full study program, but it can also be “stretched” over five years. A compulsory introductory

course lasts for approx. three months and is currently being offered by the Swiss Tropical Institute (STI) in Basel/Switzerland, the universities of Berlin, Bordeaux, Copenhagen, Brescia, Bergen and at the National School of Public Health in Madrid. After that students attend specialized modules (a module lasts one to five weeks, total: approx. 14 weeks). The modules are chosen according to the special needs of students with the assistance of personal tutors. Students complete their studies writing a scientific paper, corresponding to roughly four months of full-time work.

The program uses the “European Credit Transfer System” (ECTS) for the calculation and the transfer of study times and students’ performances.