

tropEd - a European Network for Education in International Health

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Learning through exchange is the motto of a modular curriculum leading to a postgraduate Master in International Health. In contrast to other programs this curriculum is not offered by one university or institute, but by a European network of 27 member institutions in 12 European countries: tropEd.

One of the aims of tropEd is the promotion of excellence in postgraduate learning in International Health. With a grant from the European Commission (and also financial support from national bodies, e.g. the Swiss Development Cooperation) the network was able to promote collaboration and coordination among institutions within Europe and between the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

Most of the member institutions have their roots in teaching and research in tropical medicine, but in order to meet all the requirements of health systems in low and middle income countries the focus shifted from this more classical curative point of view to an interdisciplinary strategy called International Health. Based on the New Public Health-approach, International Health focuses on poverty-related health issues in low and middle income countries. It includes the promotion of health, prevention and treatment of diseases, palliative care and rehabilitation. Studies on health systems, health economics, health policy and management of health services are central to this concept and thus, International Health has a common framework with Public Health.

International Health should not be considered as an antipode to tropical medicine, but integrates a number of disciplines including: anthropology, biology, clinical and nursing sciences, demography, epidemiology, health economics, nutrition, psychology, sociology, statistics, travel and migrant health.

According to this variety of disciplines the participants of the masters curriculum belong to different backgrounds such as medical doctors, nurses, social scientists, health educators and promoters, and health managers.

The mandatory core course students have to take gives a broad overview over relevant fields in International Public Health. Basic knowledge in topics like epidemiology, biostatistics, project management, teaching and training techniques, tropical diseases, intercultural communication, etc. is provided according to the objectives which have been agreed by all member institutions. The optional modules which can be taken after the core course provide specific knowledge and skills in different topics. In the dissertation work, students have to show their competence in a specific field in International Health. The whole curriculum is equivalent to a one year full-time study.

More than in other studies, participants are shown that interdisciplinary and therefore the ability of working in groups is a basic condition for a successful work in an intercultural context. The mobility of students between member institutions and therefore the exchange of knowledge and skills is ensured by a regulation that forces the students to study in at least two institutions in two different countries. Many member institutions also aim at equally admitting students from Europe and developing countries - but to reach this goal financial support through scholarships is necessary. Additionally, tropEd is planning to offer more courses in developing countries, ideally in teaching collaboration with institutions in the South. Currently, three courses are run jointly with such institutions.

Apart from students exchange, also teachers exchange and sharing of resources among member institutions will be further intensified. Evaluation and external review of all offered courses is one of the basic procedures for every participating institution.

For the near future tropEd has to consolidate its achievements as a network, but will be open to other interested institutions. First contacts have shown that there is a big need for training in International Health in many countries of the former Eastern Block. The experiences of the last few years in building up a European training network in International Health could also be utilized by other initiatives developing a common European curriculum in Public Health.