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Public Health Master's Programme at the Medical University of Graz

Public health today is a highly dynamic and interdisciplinary field which focuses on two scientific and practical objectives:

- the maintenance and promotion of health for an entire population or for large population groups
- further development of health care systems toward better quality of services and economic efficiency

The major social challenges of modern health assurance and health care are the maintenance and promotion of health for every member of a society as well as medical care, nursing and social support for people in need.

From a scientific point of view public health today is a branch which is genuinely related to social and humanistic sciences. Among the core disciplines are: epidemiology, health sociology and health psychology, health economics as well as the health-related topics of political sciences and law. Some chapters of business administration, organisation sciences, environmental and labour medicine and social medicine are also very important components of practical public health issues.

In order to meet the requirements of modern health care systems it is not only essential to offer excellent education for physicians, nurses and other health professionals. We also need a public health training which corresponds to international concepts and standards. International organisations, such as the WHO and the World Bank, the European Public Health Association (EUPHA) and regional organisations like the Austrian Society for Public Health (ÖGPH) have long fought for a reinforcement of the public health sector.

The first Master's programme for public health in Austria was launched 2002 at the Department for Medicine of the University of Graz. The participants of this pioneering course of studies finished their theoretical education in July 2004. After more than two years of on-the-job learning they will obtain the internationally acknowledged degree of "Master of

Public Health“ (MPH). The first group of students consisted of physicians, nursing personnel, business administrators, one student with a pharmaceuticals degree and one with a degree in sports sciences. These participants contributed greatly to the interdisciplinary spirit of the programme by sharing their know-how and individual personal and professional experience. In October 2004 the second Master’s programme for Public Health will begin at the new Medical University of Graz. The programme focuses on management in health care and health promotion, is based on a module-system and must be concluded with a scientific Master’s thesis.

In many books and articles public health is described as a field of activity with promising future opportunities. It can only be guessed, however, how the first Austrian graduates of public health will integrate themselves in the field of health care and how they will perform. Already in the course of the programme the students received possibilities for reorientation, to change jobs and to collaborate in projects. The graduates will, however, be required a certain amount of momentum, persistence, geographic mobility and personal flexibility to be able to realise their ideas and wishes for their professional life.