

# GOING INTERNATIONAL

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## Teaching Public Health Through EU Lenses

by *Alessandra Lafranconi, Kevin Rieger, Katarzyna Czabanowska und Marco Parenti*

Already a few years ago, mainly during cultural activities proposed at the School of Medicine of the University of Milano-Bicocca, an imbalance between offer and demand has been noticed: medical students are willing to study and discuss health policies and politics, but often do not have the chance to do so. In most cases, they fail to recognize the context or the institutional framework, which might be regional (in accordance with the Italian devolution of the National Health System's competences), national, or European.

In 2013, the Board of the School of Medicine approved the introduction of a new course, titled "Non-formal education" (NFE). NFE initially started with a focus on two themes: *healthcare professionals' mobility* and *ethical issues in medical practice*. NFE has been the first attempt to bring health policy and debate into a very technical environment.

Students' highly positive evaluation results have solicited NFE coordinators to proceed further. Thanks to the advices of external experts from the University of Maastricht, and with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme, the Jean Monnet Module "Development for health", in short Dev4h, will be launched at the University of Milano-Bicocca, School of Medicine, for three consecutive academic years starting from January 2017.

Using blended approach, consisting of theoretical lectures and practical laboratories, Dev4h will focus on **food and nutrition, environmental health, and access to healthcare**, to provide future healthcare and health-related professionals key abilities and tools to read, analyse, and contribute to the complex debates on public health issues. Understanding the complexity of shared competencies between the European Union and its Member States in the field of health is a key objective of the course.

Dev4h has been conceived to specifically target health science and health professional students, for whom the knowledge of EU principles and laws is fundamental [1]: even though

healthcare is mostly a national issue, we cannot ignore the existence of a single market (which impacts, for instance, the access to food and health-related technologies), as well as the increasing mobility of people between countries, either patients or healthcare professionals. Moreover, there are health-related subjects solely in the competence of the European Union, such as consumer safety, food safety, and environmental health. Thus, Dev4h is structured to address the three mentioned topics, i.e. nutrition, environment, and healthcare.

The choice of topics has been based on the following considerations:

- The EU role on health-related issues has evolved from marginal initiatives to a wide range of coordinated activities on determinants of health, such as tobacco, alcohol, dietary habits, as well as environmental determinants, social determinants, injuries, and other external causes, and misuse of drugs [2]. These public health topics are briefly treated in Medical Schools, and usually from a technical perspective only.
- The EU is also involved in actions focused on patients' needs, such as the quality of care in general and more specifically the quality of healthcare products [3]; current constraints, especially from a financial point of view, make access of care a topic of primary importance [4].
- Lastly, the internal market has important consequences for health: not only because of explicit legislation on cross-border health care, but also because of the EU dimensions of free movement on services, goods, people, and capital [5]. This dimension, together with background knowledge on the EU, its laws, and their implications on human health, will be stressed in each edition of the Module.

Additional aspects which enhance the academic value of Dev4h Module:

1. Dev4h brings to our School one external expert, affiliated to the Maastricht University, which is among the most important institutions operating in European Public Health. This action will impact not only on the quality of teaching but also on increasing networking and connections (e.g. internship possibilities, highly

encouraged by our School, with the support of the Erasmus+ Traineeship Program).

2. Dev4h applies non-formal education and problem-based teaching, thus impacting on students' learning processes: practical experience of these new teaching tools will be a lifelong learning investment for the students.

3. Dev4h challenges the students to write and present a policy position paper on healthcare professionals and their role in addressing EU challenges, which will be presented on various occasions, to enhance the students' skills, among which development of leadership will play a crucial role.

4. Dev4h is centred around the idea of open education: even though the number of participants is limited (in order to have the highest possible impact of non-formal activities), we shall not place a limit to the access of educational materials. Indeed, all materials will be uploaded on the website, in the form of: lecture handouts, additional material, recording of non-formal sessions and policy position papers.

5. Dev4h seeks a mutual relationship with civil society: not only most of the outcomes will be shared in proper meetings with civil society, but also civil society instances will be carefully underlined during the course: the collaboration with Altroconsumo (the Italian partner of the European Consumer Organization BEUC) is one example of such relationship.

6. Dev4h promotes research and teaching experience for young researchers and scholars and practitioners in EU issues: a leading role in research and teaching has been taken on by two young professionals in public health, affiliated to various European Networks (e.g. TFG - Young Forum Gastein, EUPHA - European Public Health Association, EHP - European Health Parliament, ASPHER - Association of School of

Public Health in the European Region) and trained in non-formal education techniques and problem-based approach.

7. Dev4h fosters the publication and dissemination of the results of academic research: The Module aims at addressing societal questions, such as “Do we spend public money efficiently enough for a good societal impact, in terms of health?”, and to analyse them with a scientific approach, to inform the public health community through oral abstracts at key European health events and written contributions in peer reviewed journals.

8. Last but not least, Dev4h is offered free of charge, to avoid financial barriers to committed students and their families.

Expected impacts relate to the core structure of Dev4h:

- Teaching activities: since medical doctors and health professionals in general are often considered “informed opinion leaders” by our society, the benefit of a deeper knowledge on the funding principles and the decision-making processes at the European level will not be confined to the primary audience of the course.
- Research production, undertaken by experts and motivated students: if the production is successful in addressing societal questions, it will constitute a good practice in bridging the gaps between scientists and decision-makers.
- Increased contact with external environment: possibilities of learning experiences at experts’ institutions and dialogue with civil society will respectively foster cultural awareness and dialogue, and enhance civic skills, empowerment and societal inclusion.

Dev4h intrinsic, and perhaps primary goal, is to enhance civic conscience and leadership skills of the participants [6]. Health science students have little opportunities to know the skills of the

participants [6]. Health science students have little opportunities to know the structure and the founding principles of the EU. We strongly believe that there is an urgent need to openly talk about the EU as such: with regards to the civil participation in European politics, we aim at (1) showing the positive consequences derived by the EU funding principles and reflected in the European public health arena, and (2) passing along the idea that the EU is a participatory democracy, in which every subjects have the right to express their own views.

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### Interesting websites

- [a Jean Monnet Module offered at Unimib](#)
- [Unimib module trailer](#): Trailer of the module, first year
- [Unimib module](#): description: Description of the module on the EU website:

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Leadership

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