

Public health: promoting a professional debate

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With the aim of “protecting and promoting the health of a population” (Baggott 2002, p. 1), public health is not only an interdisciplinary, holistic approach (Gutzwiller 1997) but it is also a political process influenced by ideological perspectives and dimensions (Baggott 2002). Moreover, public health policies are determined by the current definitions of health and illness as well as available possibilities of and for interventions (Hurrelmann and Laaser 2003). Therefore, they vary depending on historic and systemic contexts (Gericke and Busse 2004) as the goal of ensuring that the health needs of a population are met is subject to a continuous learning process (Rosenbrock and Gerlinger 2006). Consequently, public health is a discipline committed to discussing health-related topics from a variety of angles, comparing the results and drawing conclusions, thereby promoting a more professional, substantiated and comprehensive debate. In this issue of the *Journal of Public Health*, the authors address current topics, controversially discussed issues and problems still unsolved. In doing so, creating, evaluating and disseminating knowledge are major foci.

La Torre et al. analyze cost-effectiveness studies of tetravalent humane papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine with a weighted version of Drummond’s checklist coming to the conclusion that the studies assessed were of medium quality as they received low ratings on the items prioritized by the experts. Thus, the authors highlight the importance of using weighted scales for assessing study quality. **Boedeker and Klindworth** also focus on methods and instruments. They

develop a multidimensional ranking procedure aimed at helping to assess and prioritize the public health impact of diseases for subsequent deeper investigation regarding work-related health reports. Current European data shows that an analysis is required for illnesses of the circulatory system, the digestive system and the musculoskeletal system.

An approach frequently used to prevent work-related diseases and improve the health of employees is worksite health promotion (WHP). **Nöhammer et al.** investigate the benefits of WHP regarding individual well-being from the employee’s perspective. Positive changes in well-being were attributed to a physical/cognitive, a social, and an emotional element after factor analysis, suggesting an alternative grouping of effects compared to concepts used so far.

The impact of physical capacity on fitness may have to be partly reassessed as well. Analyzing physical capacity in physically active versus non-active adolescents, **Mikaëlsson et al.** note that being active had an influence on aerobic capacity, but was less related to muscular strength and balance. This requires future investigation of different forms of activity and their effects on the muscular system.

The importance of a high-quality knowledge base regarding illnesses, plus the responsibility of communication media, are highlighted by **Kanadiya and Sallar** who analyzed American college student’s perceptions of swine flu and resulting behaviour. The authors report a lack of substantiated knowledge about the illness and its prevention that might be related to an ineffective design of swine flu communication and news coverage. **Müller et al.** focus on the accountability of general practitioners and report evidence that these can create a supplier-induced demand (SID) for specific health services as they found positive correlations between medical costs and customer-based

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indicators. Laboratory services are mentioned as cost drivers, and strategies for reducing SID are recommended.

Prenzler et al. shed light on the German outpatient health care sector for palliative care from the caring physician's point of view and reveal the difficulties they encounter. Confronted with higher requirements, cooperation between the providers of healthcare is crucial and could be intensified especially in the area of psycho-social care. Moreover, physicians state the reimbursement system is suboptimal as palliative care is more resource-intensive.

Specific requirements are also found in the context of major life events and potentially lethal consequences. In a descriptive analysis, **González-Andrade et al.** focus on the epidemiological issues relevant in the context of suicides in Ecuador. With the prevalence being on the rise, there is still much unknown as the estimated number of unreported cases is high. **Habib et al.** did a survey in a low-income area in Lebanon to examine the association of chronic illness, war-related internal displacement and housing quality, which was shown to be strong, especially for older people, women, internally displaced, and less-educated individuals.

Regarding specific diseases, **Dujaili et al.** investigate the association between smoking and the outcomes of tubercu-

losis (TBC) treatment and show evidence that non-smoking TBC patients attain better treatment results and have a higher likelihood of cure. In a systematic review, **Alavian et al.** assess the risk factors for hepatitis C virus infection of patients on chronic hemodialysis living in the area covered by the Eastern Mediterranean Region Office of the WHO and show that nosocomial transmission is the major cause.

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