

Peace through Health II: A Framework for Medical Student Education

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The world's first university course in Peace through Health (PtH) recently finished at McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada. Medical students and academic staff in Canada and Europe have expressed interest in developing this course for other medical schools. Seven medical students were selected to do an unofficial 'audit' in return for 'in kind' work, developing the course materials for the web and adaptation to the medical curriculum. This article sets out the goals and structure of the course as a guide for similar teaching models.

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Curricula in War and Health Issues

War is the leading cause of death and disability in many countries; nevertheless the concept of Peace through Health has not so far been included in any basic medical school curriculum. Yet medical students have articulated a desire to have more medical humanities in their curricula. The International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) has promoted work on activity in Peace and Health for a number of years, and similar programmes have taken place sporadically throughout the world. It is worthwhile exploring a few of these below (web sites are given in the appendix).

Global Health

Medact, the British affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) has developed a comprehensive course on Global Health designed for undergraduate medical students. This includes modules on underdevelopment, the environment and war, and their respective effects on health. Global Health or international health courses are taught at University College, London, at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden and throughout North America.

Ecosystem Health

A course on Ecosystem Health has been used at the University of Western Ontario medical school, examining the profound effect that war and

violence can have on human health locally and globally. Ecosystem Health is 'a comprehensive and integrated approach, which reflects the health of the living and non-living world around us'. Expanding the traditional definitions of health, 'it recognizes the critical links between human activity, ecological change, and health. Trans-disciplinary by nature, ecosystem health brings together the natural, social and health sciences and incorporates ecological, social, and economic perspectives with human health'.

Health and Human Rights

Courses on Health and Human Rights have been offered throughout the United States, particularly in schools of public health including Harvard, Berkeley and Princeton. There is also a Certificate programme at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

Effects of War on Health

The idea of curricula on war and health is not new. IPPNW developed a curriculum on the medical consequences of nuclear war in the late 1980s. It was refined to include effects of war and some peace studies and security concepts in the early 1990s.¹ A course in Health and Issues of War and Peace has been taught at the Free University and the University of Amsterdam in The Netherlands since 1992. IPPNW, Physicians for Human Rights and IFMSA have promoted the expansion of this programme to all eight Dutch medical schools. In Cuba, a curriculum on the effects of war and structural violence, developed by former IPPNW co-president, Carlos Pazos, has been taught in major medical schools in Havana for over five years. The University of British Columbia has a graduate seminar course in Global Health and Human Security examining threats to human health as a result of conflict, poverty, and environmental degradation.

Peace through Health

While the courses described above have been designed to examine the effects of war and of the roots of direct and structural violence, and their relationship to health, they do not specifically address what actions health professionals can take to minimise the impact of war and actively promote peace. An exception to this is a short training course in Health as a Bridge to Peace for health professionals offered by the World Health Organization. It has been used in Indonesia through the Center for Security and Peace Studies at Gadjah Mada University and in Sri Lanka, with plans for Sudan and the Great Lakes region of Africa. The McMaster course is the first known full-credit university course in the discipline, directed at undergraduate students from many backgrounds including anthropology, biochemistry, nursing, political science, English and French.

The Course

The foundations of Peace through Health (PtH) were provided over seven sessions. Dr Robert Chase followed with six further sessions using an interactive case study approach, concentrating on the field projects in Iraq, Croatia, Gaza, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. The case studies have been reported elsewhere:² this article focuses on the sessions on the foundations of PtH.

The first two sessions reviewed important relevant concepts from peace studies theory. The framework of PtH was briefly introduced (see Figure 2, p.248 in previous article). Mental health, and in particular child mental health, has been the primary focus of McMaster's PtH fieldwork. Students examined the Afghan Peace Manual – a mental health training manual developed by Joanna Santa Barbara, Graeme MacQueen and others, which discusses concepts of non-violence, conflict analysis, reconciliation, and resolution at a very practical level – and Peace Stories to facilitate individual and social healing in post-conflict zones.

Sessions three and four introduced relevant public health and population health concepts, and the topics of health and human rights, ecosystem health, and medical and professional ethics.

The fifth and sixth sessions showed the link between war and ill health, and peace and health. Session five considered sanctions and the effect of their use on the social fabric, mental health, and economic well-being. Session six examined the effect of specific weapons systems such as landmines, small arms, and nuclear arms and related medical activism. With the assistance of the pioneer of Peace through Health, Graeme MacQueen, session seven recapitulated the framework, and other activities discussed in the course were explained in this context.

Guest professionals and academics assisted in presentation of material or theoretical aspects of the course. International health specialist Vic Neufeld explained public health frameworks and medical anthropologist Karen Trollope discussed the anthropological and cultural approach to conflict. Paul Hamel, from the University of Toronto and John Howard from the University of Western Ontario explained the ecosystem and health and human rights issues. Child psychiatrist Joanna Santa Barbara and play therapist Mary Jo Land presented relevant principles of peace and psychological analysis, discussed multi-track diplomacy and systems theory, and used a puppet show to illustrate the healing process of victims of war trauma in countries such as Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. It is hoped that the presence of experts to discuss their own work or to facilitate brief case studies would provide students with mentors and role models to act as an inspiration for their own future work.

Medical students also contributed their own efforts. Andrew Pinto demonstrated student activism and the use of a Power Point presentation developed by medical students to bring the effects of war to high school

students. A student activist, Ruba Moubarak, discussed her own role and that of health professionals opposing sanctions and war against Iraq in the last ten years, concentrating on health consequences.

Medical activists working on specific weapons systems such as small arms, landmines, and nuclear weapons have explained the rationale and process of their advocacy. The role of IPPNW as an activist organisation and the medical consequences of a nuclear war were presented by its Executive Director, Michael Christ, and Alan Phillips, a retired radiation oncologist. Each guest stimulated at least some students to inquire about opportunities to volunteer on projects.

Students were evaluated with reflection papers, midterm and final exams, and an optional group project. They were also responsible for a 5,000-word essay on peace through health projects, other elements of multi-track diplomacy (how health and other professionals could contribute to peace), and evaluation and critique of the discipline of PtH or the model of it presented.

Challenges and Opportunities

Among the major challenges will be dealing with a large number of students with varied backgrounds in an evening course after full days of work or classes. An inclusive textbook has not yet been developed; meanwhile, use of IPPNW-related books^{3,4} and papers from various journals, including the *British Medical Journal*, *The Lancet*, the *Croatian Medical Journal* and *Medicine Conflict and Survival* are used.

The McMaster University Peace through Health programme is developing its association with major international medical peace non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as IPPNW, and with the World Health Organization's Health as a Bridge to Peace programme. The university's joint Chair in Peace through Health, with support from both the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Humanities, is the world's first in the field.

Peace through Health Associates have been formed to encourage a network of international partners and to keep students involved and able to maintain communication and support as they travel. We hope that PtH will be integrated into the medical curriculum and be web-based in future years to assist those in other countries, in particular in zones of conflict, and will be able to solicit contributions from outside the province and country towards course development. We believe that the programme is an exciting development in the medical humanitarian movement.

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References

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2. MacQueen G, Santa Barbara J. Peace building through health initiatives. *BMJ* 2000; **321**: 293–6.
3. Taipale I, et al., eds. *War or Health?* London: Zed Books, 2002.
4. Levy BS, Sidel VW (eds.) *War and Public Health*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Appendix: Courses and Activities

Global Health

Medact, London: http://www.medact.org/tbx/pages/section.cfm?index_id=32.

University College London: <http://www.ihmec.ucl.ac.uk>.

Karolinska Institute, Stockholm: <http://www.phs.ki.se/globalhealth/index2.htm>.

North America: <http://www.ihmec.org>.

Ecosystem Health

University of Western Ontario (convenor, John Howard): <http://www.med.uwo.ca/ecosystemhealth/education.htm>

Health and Human Rights

University of Toronto: <http://intlhealth.med.utoronto.ca/health&humanrights.html>.

Harvard University: <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/fixcenter/education.htm>.

Berkeley University: http://www.phrusa.org/education/syllabus_2001.html.

Princeton University: http://www.phrusa.org/education/syllabus_1998.html.

John Hopkins School of Public Health (Certificate Program): <http://commprojects.jhsph.edu/academics/Detail.cfm?id=2>.

Effects of War on Health

Free University, Amsterdam (convenor, Henk Groenewegen), and University of Amsterdam (convenor, Fernando Lopez da Silva): <http://www.antenna.nl/nvmp/educas.html>.

University of British Columbia (convenor, Jerry Spiegel): <http://www.cgh.igi.ubc.ca/cgh7.html>.

Peace through Health

World Health Organization: http://www.who.int/disasters/hbp_training.cfm.

Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia: <http://www.csp-s-ugm.or.id/artikel/hbp2.htm>.

McMaster University: <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/peace-health>.

International Federation of Medical Students' Associations: <http://www.uib.no/People/mfakh/MW/FRactivity.html>.

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