

## An Insight into International Health and the Overlap of Terms

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### Abstract

The health of each one of us, directly and indirectly, affects others as well. International Health as we know today is because of the fact that communication and transport have become fast, instantaneous and convenient. It is very crucial to take a versatile approach to public health problems, which are often complex in nature since Health is a very vast concept and not merely a biological event. International health, in Koplan's view, has mainly focused on health issues, especially infectious diseases, and maternal and child health in low-income countries. Public health is generally is viewed as having a focus on the health of the population of a specific country or community, a perspective shared by Koplan et al. The burden of preventable disease is more concentrated in the middle- and low-income countries; most of the global health centres are located in high-income countries which adversely affects the international health. However, we are yet to explain to ourselves what exactly the term International Health means. To add to our woes, we have similar or near similar terms used in adjunction or synonymously. We suggest that academic institutions have an opportunity – as well as a responsibility – to assure that leadership for global health is as inclusive and worldwide as the tasks ahead are broad and daunting.

**Keywords:** International Health; Public Health; Global Health; Tropical medicine.

### Introduction

The health of each of us, directly and indirectly, affects others as well. It is important to take a versatile approach to public health problems, which are often very complex in nature since

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Health is a vast concept and not merely a biological phenomenon [1].

International Health as we know today is because of the fact that communication and transport have become fast and convenient. We can travel from one part of the world to another part of the world in just a few hours and so can the organisms with us. As a result, one country's health issues are not just their own anymore. This gives rise to the concept of shared responsibilities where each and everyone has to bear the burden of the devil. Populations have become more multicultural and borders are passed over more easily by wars and diseases, which makes the control of infectious diseases very complicated. Doctors are more likely to face refugees, with their particular mental and physical health problems. Information now spreads very quickly, and to understand how research agendas are shaped by global priorities has become very important. The results of scientific studies are frequently cited far away from their origin country, and an understanding of a population's genetic, cultural, and environmental differentiation is vital

before conclusions can be drawn [2]. However, we are yet to explain ourselves what exactly is the real meaning of the term International Health. To add to our woes, we have indistinguishable or near indistinguishable terms used in adjunction or synonymously. In rather simpler terms, Global health means 'coming of age' at least as measured by the increasing number of academic centers, especially in high-income countries, although many of these centres have strong links with low- and middle-income countries. A common and widely accepted definition of Global health is yet to come up [1,3].

The approach to medicine which concerns itself with the health of the community as a whole is Public Health. Public Health is community health since it's vital to all of us all the time. Community Health generally focuses on a defined geographical area. However, diseases are not restricted to the border of the geographical area. Saying that we will cater to a certain area will not only land us in isolation but will also make dealing with health problems unholistic.

### **The Health Concern: An Overlap of terms**

Koplan and colleagues differentiated among global health, international health, and public health [1]. However, there is still predominant confusion and overlap between the three terms. In Koplan's view, International health focuses on health issues, especially infectious diseases, and maternal and child health in low-income countries. However, certain authors have also described international health synonymous to global health. For example, Merson et al. define international health as 'the application of the principles of public health to problems and challenges that affect low and middle-income countries and to the complex array of global and local forces that influence them' [1,4].

In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, tropical medicine grew as a discipline. This was the time when many doctors and scientists from Asia, Africa, and Latin America visited Europe for training and returned home to establish teaching schools of medicine and public health. This led to the integration of the aspects of tropical medicine into their curricula and setting up research institutions dedicated to tropical medicine [5].

Around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, international health grew as an activity and became a hub of professional enterprises that involved

the development of international programs to promote health, prevent and control disease, and support developing countries in developing and strengthening their healthcare delivery system. In the late 1970s, a dual health movement started. On one hand, the international organizations started promoting programmes to deliver immunization, family planning, and growth monitoring among others – as elements of improving primary care – while, on the other hand, schools of tropical medicine, and public health led the development of education and research programs in international health. Training in international health became and remains popular among health professionals living and working in developing countries [3].

Emporiatrics, better known as travel medicine, is that branch of medicine which deals with the prevention and management of health problems of international travelers [6]. The basic tenet of travel medicine is selecting the necessary and best prevention strategy without unnecessary adverse events, cost or inconvenience [7]. It is one of the lesser known and explored faculties of medicine, even though it plays a crucial role in maintaining global health in general and a country's health in particular, especially for the low and middle-income countries.

Public health is said to be that branch which has a focus on the health of the population of a specific country or community, a perspective shared by Koplan et al. [2,8] Fried et al. do not share this view and disagree with any distinction between public health and global health and suggest that 'public health is global health for the public good' [9].

A definitive working definition of global health was proposed by Kaplan et al. quoted as "Global health is an area or study, research, a practice that places a priority on improving health and achieving equity in health in all people worldwide [2].

### **The Scenario**

Though it is well known that the burden of preventable diseases is more in the low- and middle-income countries, most of the global health centers are located in high-income countries. Several factors are responsible for this; The Centres in low- and middle-income countries are also engaged in issues concerning global health but under other labels. For example, several centers in low- and middle-income countries have been funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institutes to undertake prevention activities against

chronic diseases, though their focus seems to be on the related national programmes [10]. Global health may be seen as a separate issue from the health needs of low- and middle-income countries which are already struggling under the pressure of many other challenging issues. Strong national public health institutions help in instigating an interest in global public health among masses, which are usually lacking in LMIC [11].

It has been found that socio-cultural, environmental, economic and institutional factors and sub-factors- the reasons for the globalization process- have a strong impact on Population Health. New global health initiatives are being created by several health institutions, particularly in North America. However, there is no common consensus on the term global health, agreement about the content of global health courses, or of what it means to work or conduct research in global health.

Also, there is no obvious trend to develop global health initiatives of an academic nature in low- or middle-income countries. The reason for this could be because global health is primarily being defined by institutions in developed countries and in terms of their working with developing countries. Thus global health, for any developing country institution, when defined in this way, is business as usual. As the interest in global health increases, there is a threat that all this new energy for global health will result in it becoming an activity developed through the lens of rich countries, ostensibly for the benefit of poor countries, but without the key ingredients of a mutually agreed collaborative endeavor [3].

### Summary and Conclusion

Thus we find that health has taken up an uphill course of including many new diseases in its arena because of increased transport and communication and improved cross-cultural activities. Along with it, the terms and manifests have also taken a turn and have fragmented and segmented themselves to cater to certain topics or areas. This adds to the already existing confusion of what to include and how to tackle.

This concept once clarified will lead to better acceptance of the job and activities taken up. People tend to attempt those activities which either

satisfy them or pay them well. So in order to attract more personnel in these fields, we definitely need to provide inputs and more job responsibilities as well as scope. But before that, we suggest to devise and provide proper segregation of the terms so that courses and curriculum can be specific and predetermined. We would suggest that academic institutions be given an opportunity – as well as a responsibility – to assure that the leadership for global health should be as comprehensive and multinational as the tasks ahead are immense and intimidating.

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