

NEED ASSESSMENT FOR POSTGRADUATE TRAINING IN PUBLIC HEALTH IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to assess the felt-need for postgraduate training in public health among the already qualified health workers in Nigeria. A total of 174 respondents were selected by multi-stage sampling technique, 139 (79.9%) indicated the need for postgraduate training in public health. Majority of the respondents prefers full-time, short-term courses. Epidemiology (13.7%) and health management (12.9%) were the major areas of felt-need while occupational health (3.6%) was the least. The study showed an increased need for public health and the need for proper orientation of the public workers to the principle of intersectional collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Public health in its present form is a combination of scientific disciplines and it involves skills and strategies like epidemiological investigations, planning and management, medical care, surveillance and evaluation that are directed to the maintenance and implementation of the health of the people.¹ An appropriate training in public health is therefore inevitable for effective health services².³ This study was carried out to assess the felt-need for postgraduate training in public health among the already qualified health workers in Nigeria.

A cross sectional study of health workers across the various public sectors in south -west Nigeria was undertaken in

March 2002. A multi-stage sampling method was adopted to select the sample. The various public sectors based on their function was the stratifying factor. The data were collected by a self administered, structured and close-ended questionnaire.

RESULTS

A high proportion 79.9% indicated need for postgraduate training in public health. Significantly higher proportion 94.5% was from the hospitals, followed by community-based services 72.75% and academics 64.4% ($p=0.00007$). In addition significantly higher proportion from medical profession 93.8% indicated need for postgraduate training when compared with those from non-medical profession 73.1% ($p=0.0005$). However position in establishment does not significantly alter the felt need for postgraduate training in public health ($p=0.84$). Those with first degree or its lesser equivalence indicated greater need for training (56.8% vs 43.1% $p=0.024$).

The major factor expressed by the workers as responsible for their motivation to study was knowledge enrichment 59.4%, sponsorship 28.6% and work advancement 9.0%. The most preferred mode of study is the one year MSc full time 39.4%, followed by 18 months MPH full time 18.9%, 3 years MPH part-time 16.7%, 6 months DPH full-time 15.2% and the least preferred was the 2 years DPH part-time 9.8%. Major areas of felt need in public health training include epidemiology 13.75% and health management 12.9%, others include environmental health 8.6%, community health

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7.9%, health education 7.2% and social-medicine 7.2% while the least preferred was occupational health 3.6%.

DISCUSSIONS

A high proportion of respondents indicated need for postgraduate training in public health. This showed a gradual orientation of health care delivery in Nigeria from curative to preventive care. Majority of the respondents prefer full-time short-term courses and indicated the need for sponsorship. The experience is that most of the students continue to combine these tedious academic schedules with their jobs, thus leading to inefficiency on their jobs and the production of half backed graduates. A large proportion of the public workers still believe that only workers in community health services and senior health workers benefits from training in public health. This shows the need for proper orientation of public workers to the principle of intersectoral collaboration in the health care delivery at the community level as originally

intended by WHO⁴.

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