

Short communication

DEVELOPING TRAINING IN MIGRATION HEALTH: UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS MEDICAL SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The rapidly growing influx of migrants and refugees has led WHO to call repeatedly for the development and/or strengthening of a migrant-sensitive health-care system in Member States. Until recently, the higher education system in Europe had not responded to this need. The University of Pécs Medical School has introduced both

training and research in migration health as a new priority field. The training of medical students and health professionals is ongoing at three levels: compulsory and optional undergraduate training, and postgraduate training. The Operational Medicine Department of the University of Pécs Medical School works in close cooperation with the

WHO Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe project. The University of Pécs is coordinating a consortium of six European higher education institutions to develop a new interdisciplinary curriculum: MSc in Migrant Health. The training programme will be launched in 2017 by the University of Pécs and Danube University Krems.

Keywords: MIGRANT HEALTH, HUMAN RESOURCE NEED, MSC IN MIGRANT HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS MEDICAL SCHOOL

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Over the past years, countries in the European Union (EU) have faced a rapidly growing influx of migrants and refugees. This came to a head in 2015, when more than 1 million refugees were registered (1). This influx of refugees challenges health and public health services in host countries, as there are several shortcomings in the mechanism of reception of migrants and its integration with health management services (2).

To overcome these shortcomings, the WHO Regional Office for Europe in cooperation with the Italian Government organized a High-level Meeting on Refugee and Migrant Health on 23–24 November 2015 (3). The meeting highlighted the need for a “migrant-sensitive” health-care system.

Another meeting organized in Stockholm on 12–13 November 2015 by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control on “Evidence-based guidance: prevention of infectious diseases among newly arrived

migrants in the EU/EEA” underlined that migrants do not create special public health threats; however, the host society has to be prepared to attend to their health needs at the country, regional and interregional levels. The leading concerns should be public health safety, a humanitarian attitude and solidarity (4).

In 2008, World Health Assembly resolution WHA61.17 called WHO Member States to strengthen their efforts at addressing the rapidly growing need for appropriate health assistance for migrant and refugee populations (5). However, not much progress has been made in capacity-building of human resources. Some initiatives have been taken to develop and launch training modules on migrant health assistance, for example, EQUI-HEALTH (6), Migrant and Ethnic Minorities Training Packages (MEM-TP) (7) and Culturally Competent in Medical Education (8), but these are not comprehensive and cover only some aspects. The University of Pécs Medical School has implemented, over the past decade, a migrant and ethnic minority health programme for both undergraduates and postgraduates.

THE UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS

The 650-year-old University of Pécs is one of the largest higher educational institutes in Hungary, and is internationally recognized for its high quality of research (9). The Chair of Migration Health, as a unit of the Department of Operational Medicine (10), was established in 2005 to address the emerging phenomenon of migration and find a solution for this increasing challenge in both research and education (Box 1).

BOX 1. ONGOING HEALTH-RELATED TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMES FOR MIGRANTS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

Undergraduate medical training

A. Regular/compulsory subjects

- Migration health aspects in family medicine
- Migration health aspects in occupational health

B. Optional programmes

- Health aspects of humanitarian assistance
- Migration health and travel medicine
- Special aspects in health assistance of Roma and ethnic minority communities
- New migration health challenges in the EU health-care system

Postgraduate programmes for medical and health-care professionals

Cultural competence in medical and health assistance training and practice

Since 2011, when the WHO Regional Office for Europe started with its project Public Health Aspects of Migration in Europe (PHAME), the Operational Medicine Department of the University of Pécs Medical School has worked in close cooperation with the WHO project's management team. In 2014, the University of Pécs signed a memorandum of understanding with the Regional Office on cooperation in migration health. Within its framework, the Department is hosting/coordinating the work of the WHO PHAME newsletter (11).

Migration health, as a new interdisciplinary field of health sciences, requires a new type of health professional who has comprehensive knowledge on the importance of planning, developing, implementing and

managing ethnoculturally inclusive and responsive health-care systems. To provide adequate health care to migrants and refugees, the health professional should be prepared to handle both the geographical and epidemiological aspects of migration for sustainability of provision of migrant-sensitive health care. This type of health professional would be able to respond to the growing need for capacity-building in “diversity-responsive health-care management”, with special attention to underserved people such as migrants and ethnic minorities in the EU. The varied cultural needs of different communities and age groups have to be kept in mind to provide responsive health care for them.

To realize this objective, the University of Pécs formed a coalition with five other European higher education institutions (known as the CHANCE Consortium) to develop a new interdisciplinary curriculum – MSc in Migrant Health: Addressing New Challenges in Europe. The partner universities are the University of East Anglia, UK; Danube University Krems, Austria; Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia; Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität, Greifswald, Germany; and Medizinische Universität Graz, Austria (12).

The Consortium was successful in securing funds from the European Commission Erasmus programme to develop the European Master's training programme. The proposal received 100% of available scores on “European added value”, underlining the great need for new training initiatives in this field (Box 2).

BOX 2. MSC IN MIGRANT HEALTH TRAINING PROGRAMME OF THE CHANCE CONSORTIUM

The six-semester, 120 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) value course is built around six training modules:

- Module 1: epidemiology and research methodology;
- Module 2: environmental medicine and occupational health;
- Module 3: economic/health economic impact of migration;
- Module 4: organization and systems management;
- Module 5: clinical and public health assessment;
- Module 6: social and behavioural aspects of migration, including multicultural and multireligious aspects and their health/mental health impact.

This programme is fully in line with the objectives of the PHAME project. Following a successful pilot phase, it will be launched in 2017 by the University of Pécs and Danube University Krems (13).

CONCLUSION

The WHO Regional Office for Europe is aware of the importance of adequate education on migrant health for providing migrant-sensitive health systems that are able to respond to the diverse health needs of migrants and refugees. This aspect was emphasized at the WHO High-level Meeting on Refugee and Migrant Health, held in Rome on 23–24 November 2015. The initiative of the University of Pécs as coordinator of the CHANCE Consortium fulfils a great need across the Region to provide health-care, public health and social-care professionals with the necessary skills, knowledge and orientation to treat migrants. Such professionals will have the capacity to design, plan and implement health and social-care programmes for migrant populations, and conduct health- and migration-related research. Provision of adequate health assistance is an essential tool for the smooth and successful integration of these populations.

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