

From theory to population health impact: adopting a novel approach into the public health education curriculum for nursing professionals

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According to relevant health indicators in the European Union, Croatia is at the very bottom in terms of life expectancy and at the very top in terms of chronic non-communicable diseases, cancers and injuries. In order to improve the health of Croatian citizens, a multidisciplinary approach is needed at all levels of the health system, especially in primary health care. It has been proven that well-designed public health actions achieve good results in disease prevention and health promotion; however, a targeted and sustainable impact warrants specific skills from health professionals. Therefore, within the graduate course “Public Health and Health Promotion”, the Department of Nursing of the University North (University centre Varaždin) decided to implement a specific educational strategy for graduate students enrolled in the ‘Management of nursing’ MSc study program centred on public health project development. Another novelty was a stringent examination (stemming from the aforementioned project development task) in terms of presenting and explaining a step-wise approach of public health project design and implementation. Prior to the exam, teams of five members were formed, headed by students who had the best individual proposals for public health projects (according to two independent graders). Each proposal had to contain a scientific basis for the selection and significance of the topic, the method of implementation, a SWOT analysis of the project (as well as other relevant analyses), as well as a realistic financial structure. Over the course of three years, over 50 different projects were presented, and some of them came to life in practice, while several of them received support for their implementation from the University. Although this method of final course exam organisation was met with initial resistance from all three generations of students, the course ended up receiving the highest marks for educational quality.