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Primary care health professions, similarities and diversities

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Abstract

A large number of medical disciplines involved in the population health and well-being sustainment, and their fields of study occasionally overlap with one another. Comparative descriptions of these diverse disciplines can help foster the creation of more fruitful collaborations. These disciplines collaborate in a wide variety of settings, with different professions and layers of society, ranging from politicians and community leaders, to psychologists and engineers, and they experience a wide range of settings of tasks. As these disciplines have proven to be indispensable to human health and well-being, their place in the health care sector will thrive and consolidate.

Keywords: Primary health care, advocacy, professions, similarities, diversities

Introduction

Although the medical disciplines that will be covered in this manuscript are numerous and fairly fragmented, they are intertwined with each other in many subjects, and while there are opportunities for joint interventions as a result, field conflicts may also be unavoidable. Defining these diverse disciplines by contrasting to one another can help to avoid field conflicts and foster creation of more fruitful collaborations. For this purpose, this manuscript attempts to define the common and distinct aspects of these disciplines.

Method

Each discipline's name was entered into the search engine in order, and definitions from relatively recent articles published on the subject were gathered to create a list of definitions. The following medical fields were reviewed: public health, community medicine, general practice, family medicine, preventive medicine, health promotion, social medicine, occupational medicine, disaster medicine, and traditional medicine.

Findings and Discussion

Public Health: The concept of public health expresses the recognition of importance of activities of health promotion, disease prevention, and treatment purposes. Public health is defined as the science of protecting communities, keeping them safe, and improving their health through education, policy, and research to prevent illness and injury. A public health professional protects and improves human population's health. However, everyone's definition of public health may be different. It may involve wrestling with numbers, conducting research, developing policy, or working in the community, depending on the interests of the person doing it; all of these have a place in the definition of public health [1].

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the term "public health" was coined to refer to all organized public and private measures taken to prevent disease, promote health, and extend life in an entire community. Its activities aim to create social conditions in which people can be healthy and focus on the whole community, rather than focusing individual cases or diseases" [2].

Many distinctions can be made between public health and clinical branches. While public health encompasses a wide range of professional disciplines such as medicine, dentistry, nursing, psychiatry, nutrition, social work, environmental sciences, health education, health management, and behavioral sciences, its activities are focused on the entire community rather than individuals [3]. While other medical fields are responsible for treating people who exhibit symptoms of specific diseases, public health professionals are primarily focus on

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improving the community well-being by attempting to prevent people from becoming sick or injured and encouraging them to develop healthy behaviors. To this end, the public health professionals monitor and diagnose the health status and disease risks of an entire community, as well as promote healthy practices and behaviors to keep the community healthy^[4].

Public health professionals plan, prioritize, manage, and evaluate tasks ranging from research to health education in order to keep the community healthy. A clinician's priority is to find new antibiotics, whereas a public health professional's priority is to review hygiene measures in hospitals^[5]. The public health professional is responsible for detecting disease outbreaks in a timely manner, as well as determining who is more likely than others to develop certain diseases (risk groups). Public health practice also focuses on regulation and control of the environment for the public interest. Consequently, it is also involved in the provision of housing, water, and food. Public health medicine is a part of a wide range of population health protection and development initiatives^[6].

Public health professionals are obligated to prevent disease spread in a specific community, whether it concerns a single household or the entire country. Their work is mostly preventive, ensuring that their populations have safe food and water and organizing public information campaign about health and well-being. They seek to comprehend the dynamics of disease spread in a specific community. Public health professionals provide critical information to decision-makers in the health community and at the government level by examining the patterns of various diseases, and how they affect society. Public health professionals play a vital role in keeping the populations as healthy as they can be in these and other ways^[7].

Community medicine: A community physician in a health center is responsible for providing comprehensive basic health care to the entire community, including the diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic diseases in children, adults, and the elderly, disease prevention and screenings for early diagnosis, routine maternal-child health services, immunization, some minor surgical interventions, and mental health services, by applying for the assistance of other medical specialties as needed^[8]. Community physicians are close to the community they serve because they provide health care services to community members throughout their lives and provide follow up visits at home. Community physicians are primarily focused on disease prevention; their primary duties include understanding the determinants and natural course of diseases in the communities they serve, as well as the impact of the environment on community health and disease^[9].

Community physicians are involved in health care issues that affect the entire community. It is a branch of medicine concerned with the study of the health and disease of a specific community, with the goal of identifying the health problems and needs of that community, planning and implementing measures to improve the health of the community, and evaluating the extent of the impact of those measures^[8]. Community physicians are primary health care specialists and are physicians who identify and manage common diseases and health problems in the community. This primary health care provider identifies, prioritizes and manages health problems in community jointly and in

collaboration with the views of community leaders and ensuring their participation^[10].

Through a 'Primary Health Care' approach, community medicine safeguards and fosters the health and well-being of communities. It is in charge of assessing and analyzing community health needs and health status, developing appropriate, technically and practically feasible disease prevention and control strategies, and improving community health through health promotion, health education, and health protection. Community physicians are responsible for using their clinical knowledge and skills to diagnose and treat common health problems for the benefit of the community through preventive, curative, promotional, restorative, and rehabilitative measures as Primary Health Care physicians^[11].

The community physician will be a competent leader of the health care team at the Basic Health Care level and should have a investigative personality in addition to leadership qualities. A community physician is a manager skilled in developing public health policies, designing and implementing health programs, identifying and ranking local needs and evaluating health activities. The successful implementation of a community health program under the leadership of a physician depends on the mutual cooperation of all levels of health personnel, social workers, and community leaders involved in the program, and a shared team approach^[12].

Community medicine is a system that provides comprehensive preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative health care services to a community in order to improve its health through a health care team. It is concerned with communities or groups rather than individual cases. It is responsible for identifying and assessing the community's health needs and health problems affecting the community, as well as designing appropriate measures for the planning, organization, delivery and evaluation of health care to meet these needs in the best way possible with the available resources. Community medicine is a bridge between public health and clinical medicine^[13].

Community physicians adopt a slightly different approach than public health to keeping their population healthy. Instead of examining dissemination of diseases directly, community physicians focus on how factors such as socioeconomic challenges and cultural barriers affect overall health. They frequently attempt to reach communities via health education programs that promote healthy behaviors. The community medicine profession "assists in closing health gaps caused by differences in race and ethnicity, locality, social location, income and other factors affecting health."^[14]

General practitioner: A general practitioner, also known as a GP or primary level physician, is a physician responsible for the diagnosis and treatment of all types of conditions, acute and chronic. GPs take a more holistic approach to their patients and facilitate the work of hospital specialists. The general practitioner plays an important role in the field of medicine, being the first point of contact for individuals^[15]. Since their service is not limited to certain parts of the body or organs, they have a much better chance of helping patients of all ages, genders and with different health problems^[16].

A general practitioner is a medical doctor who has met the basic professional requirements to become a health

practitioner without the need for further specialization. Instead of specializing, they have the competencies to perform different roles. Once assigned to serve a specific community, the general practitioner will serve as the surgeon, internist, gynecologist and other specialists as needed [17]. General practice, as a medical discipline based on interrelationships, is defined by the characteristics of its own discipline. General practice is a medical branch characterized by its broad scope of activity. The term 'general' refers to the wide variety of procedures performed and the practitioner's broad and wide-ranging field of activity [18].

General practice is a unique discipline. The general practitioner gains the ability to practice evidence-based medicine in the community at the end of the process of scientific and medical training, placing the general practitioner at the heart of an effective primary health care system. These characteristics coupled with the discipline's holistic, relationship-based philosophy and broad generalist practice; greatly distinguish it from other medical disciplines [19]. The general practitioner is the basis of a system that provides person-centered, seamless healthcare delivery based on a trusting relationship between the patient and the GP doctor [20].

Family physician: Family medicine is designed to provide a wide range of health care services within a specific health care provision model, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. The specialty of family medicine integrates biological, clinical and behavioral sciences. Family physicians should have the attitudes, skills and knowledge allowing them to provide continuous and comprehensive health care to each member of the family. Family physicians are Primary Health Care providers [21]. A key feature of family medicine is the establishment of an integrated and continuous service-oriented physician-patient relationship. The family physician is obligated to provide optimal medical care, rather than focusing on a single organ-system of the patient, but looking at the whole. They not only diagnose and treat acute and chronic diseases, but they also provide routine health screening and lifestyle change counseling in order to prevent diseases. Family physicians can provide 80-90% of the medical care needed in the community they serve, and beyond that, they must also know when to call on specialized knowledge. Direct contact with hospital specialists ensures that their patients receive the best care. Today, family medicine is now recognized as an independent specialty [22].

The term "family medicine" stresses the physician-patient relationship as well as the view of the human being as a whole within his/her family and community. Family medicine is a medical specialty that offers comprehensive health care to people of all ages. Family medicine is the specialty of overcoming common and some long-lasting illnesses in children and adults, with a focus on overall health and well-being. This definition is based on the concept of common diseases, implying that family physicians can manage many diseases at the community level. This definition refers to the unique and enduring feature of the specialty: holistic care. This key feature of general practice includes giving a patient-centered care service that is continuous throughout the family life cycle. Family medicine is a medical specialty that provides

comprehensive and continuing care for the individual and family [23].

Family physicians are specialist physicians who have been trained in accordance with the principles of this discipline. They are the person's doctors, primarily responsible for providing comprehensive and continuing healthcare for all those in need. They serve individuals within their family, community and culture. When discussing treatment plans with their patients, they integrate factors such as culture and dignity into this discussion, taking advantage of the acquaintance and trust that comes from repeated visits.²⁴ Family physicians carry out their professional role through health promotion, disease prevention, treatment, care and palliation services. When they are unable to provide these services themselves, they refer their patients to appropriate hospital service and assist them in receiving this service. They are responsible for constantly updating and enhancing their knowledge and skills in order to provide effective care and ensure the safety of their patients [25].

Preventive medicine: Preventive health care includes all disease prevention measures taken. Disease prevention is based on forward-looking actions, which are classified as primal, primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. The term "prevention" includes the knowledge, attitudes, concepts, behaviors, programs and practices aimed at delaying or completely eliminating the onset of disease, disability and other conditions [26]. Primary prevention generally refers to the prevention of disease or condition before its biological onset. This can be accomplished by several ways, including preventing exposure to environmental factors, increasing a person's resistance to disease, providing advice and organizing educational programs to reduce risk-taking behaviors [27]. General environmental and hygiene measures such as provision of potable water and adequate food, the promotion of condom use to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, the encouragement of seat belts in cars, the use of masks and hand washing, reliable and effective immunization practices are all examples of primary prevention, with the common feature that these measures prevent disease agents from finding a foothold in vulnerable people [28].

Preventive health care is becoming especially important given the extraordinary rise in the prevalence of chronic diseases and deaths from them worldwide. There are many diverse approaches to disease prevention. One of them is preventing adolescent smoking initiation via information programs. Even if they feel healthy, people of all ages should have regular check-ups at reasonable age-appropriate intervals to screen for disease, identify disease risk factors, remind them of the tactics of living a healthy life, ensure timely age-appropriate immunization and, most importantly, maintain a good and close relationship with their health care provider [29].

Preventive medicine is now in service as a specialty in many countries. These medical specialists have two main jobs: health promotion and disease prevention. Preventive medicine has been recognized as a specialty that focuses on both individual and collective health. The goal of preventive medicine is to promote health and well-being in order to prevent disease, disability, and death [30]. Preventive medicine specialists can provide community-based services as well as one-to-one preventive clinical health services to patients admitting to the clinic. In both cases, the goal is to

reduce the risk levels of the patient or the community, which contribute to premature morbidity and mortality. Today, the emphasis of preventive medicine has shifted from focusing on the high prevalence diseases themselves to the underlying behaviors that cause these conditions. Preventive medicine adopts this approach and shapes intervention strategies that target disease-causing behaviors^[31].

Health Promotion: According to the Lalonde Report (1974), health promotion is “the art and science of assisting people in changing their lifestyles and progressing optimal health.” “Health promotion is the process of assisting people to take more control over and improve their health (WHO)”. The three main health promotion strategies can be defined as enabling, mediating and advocacy^[32].

The term “health promotion” is used to encompass disease prevention interventions and behaviors, many of these activities can also be understood to be directed towards the most positive behaviors, emotional attitudes and well-being, regardless of the occurrence of disease or its risk. These include quitting tobacco use, exercising regularly, adopting to a low-fat diet, and participating in health education programs^[33]. Tailored approaches for health promotion can be tested in a variety of settings, such as schools, hospitals, workplaces and residential areas. Health promotion should be integrated into all policies so that it can lead to positive health outcomes when used effectively^[34].

Health promotion measures focus on a set of high-priority diseases. The Millennium Development Goals have identified a number of key health issues, with improvements deemed critical for development. These include maternal and child health, malaria, tuberculosis, HIV and other determinants of health^[35]. Recent decades have witnessed a major contribution of chronic degenerative diseases to the global burden of disease and mortality. These are mostly preventable thanks to effective and feasible public health interventions targeting key modifiable risk factors like tobacco use, inadequate diet, inactivity and excessive alcohol consumption. Eliminating common risk factors such as poor diet, inactivity, and tobacco use can prevent 80% of heart disease and stroke, 80% of diabetes, and 40% of cancers^[36].

On this basis, health promotion may be defined as “the science and art of assisting people in changing their lifestyles to move towards optimal health,” health promotion is a key intervention in the control of chronic degenerative diseases^[37].

Social medicine: Social medicine is the organized study of the social, genetic and environmental factors that impact human diseases and disabilities, as well as disease prevention methods, and preventive health measures for individuals and communities. Social medicine investigates how social and economic conditions impact health, diseases and the practices of medicine, and how we can improve the conditions that lead to a healthier society^[38]. Social medicine focuses on the broadest determinants of health, such as housing, education, income, poverty, transportation, health service organization, and environmental and genetic influences. By targeting these determinants, it seeks to save more lives by preventing the occurrence of diseases and saving costs. The social worker’s job is to reorganize and restore the life order of individuals and families whose lives have been disrupted by illness after treatment. Social

medicine brings the clinic and the community together^[39]. When it comes to the confusion regarding the distinction between social and socialized medicine, social medicine encompasses the whole of today’s diagnostic and therapeutic medicine, as well as preventive medicine according to some definitions. In addition, social medicine incorporates hygiene and public health. It operates as a community service in social units at the nationwide, city, and community levels. Social medicine, in some ways, expresses dissatisfaction with the biological medicine and the conventional medical practice as a laboratory extension, which is only vaguely aware of the whole human being and completely ignorant of the entire environment^[40].

Socialized medicine is the delivery of medical and support services to all individuals within a community at all levels. If a country’s health policy is socialized, the cost of needed services is covered by public resources rather than individuals and households out of pocket payments. Socialized medicine ensures that every individual has access to medical services when they are needed, without endangering their personal finances. “Universal health care” might be a better term for “all inclusive” insurance regimes^[41]. A universal health care is a health care system that offers health insurance to all legal residents. It ensures that all legal residents of a country have access to quality basic health care, regardless of their income, employment or health status. The most important benefit of universal health care is, of course, that it allows every legal resident of a country to access health care regardless of their ability to pay^[42].

While public health focuses on the environment, social medicine is concerned with the individual, and seeks to study the individual in his or her environment in relation to it. While public health limits itself to measures such as housing, safe water and sanitation, social medicine encompasses the full range of full range of economic, nutritional, employment, educational, and psychological opportunities or experiences for individuals and communities. In general, public health is associated with infectious diseases. In contrast, the scope of social medicine is broader, including non-communicable diseases, mental health and injuries^[43].

Occupational medicine: The workplace physician is in charge of ensuring the health, safety and well-being of the employee in the workplace. Occupational medicine can be considered as a specialized form of public health; it is responsible for reducing risks in the employee’s work environment. Public health sets safety standards to protect employees^[44]. Occupational health is defined as a broad specialized activity that draws on knowledge from other disciplines such as medicine, chemistry, physics, toxicology, physiology, psychology and safety technology^[45].

Occupational medicine, as a specialty, has changed dramatically in the last decade. With the growing awareness of the effects of occupational hazards on human health and the rise of litigation, and the proliferation of regulations have all drawn attention on this medical discipline designed to prevent occupational diseases.⁴⁶ Thus, ethical issues have been included into occupational medicine, poison control centers have begun to conduct occupational disease surveillance, and the appointment and training of primary care physicians as workplace physicians has been added to

the agenda ^[47].

Disaster medicine: Each disaster is a public health emergency (PHEs), with a scope ranging from local to global. The health professions, whether created by nature or man, are always tackling with injuries and illnesses on the frontlines of disaster settings. But in order to respond to such a volatile social and economic phenomenon, health professions, regardless of types of specialty and degree, should have a basic understanding of disaster management systems and be able to integrate their different roles to manage illness and injury and protect health ^[48]. During a disaster or PHE, healthcare professionals are responsible for protecting and maintaining the safety of their patients, their families and communities, as well as their own health. The types of pathology and injuries expected to occur in each PHE may be different; health professions must be knowledgeable and vigilant in this regard, be able to anticipate and respond in a timely manner to specific health-impairing situations, recognize the general characteristics of PHEs and anticipate their impact on the community, and be able to report a public health case and have the ability to access the necessary data to do so ^[49].

The vast majority of disasters occurs at the community level, whether in the rich world or the poor world, and can be controlled by community's resources and initiatives. Rarer large-scale PHEs can put unforeseen pressure on the existing public health infrastructure and health system; the number of casualties and death tolls in the first case being limited, while in the second this figures reach up to tens of thousands as seen in the South Eastern Turkey and Syria in 2023. Regardless of their size, PHEs require additional coordination and collaboration between public health authorities and clinical specialties ^[50].

Forced displacement of those exposed to stressful situations, in addition to injury during the disaster, is significantly associated with post-disaster psychological problems. Women, the elderly and refugees are the groups most at risk of showing post-disaster psychological problems. Furthermore, those with pre-disaster psychological problems are at higher risk of post-disaster psychological problems. Refugees often present to health care services with musculo-skeletal complaints and gastrointestinal problems after the disaster ^[51]. Only disaster-related variables itself increase physician visits with injuries in the year following the disaster; injuries seen during the recovery phase are directly related to the disaster. Physicians should be more alert to adverse health conditions that may develop in this high-risk group, who are more likely to present with both psychological and physical problems. Early screening interventions for high-risk groups who have previously exhibited psychological problems, have been forced to relocate, or have experienced stressful events during the disaster are useful in preventing long-term adverse effects ^[52].

Traditional medicine: Traditional-alternative medicine is practiced all over the world. Traditional medicine practices differ greatly between regions and countries, owing to factors such as culture, history, personal attitudes and philosophy. The theory and practice of most of them are quite different from conventional medicine ^[53]. Traditional medicine, which is based on a wide range of treatments, can be basically divided into two categories: medication and

non-medication. Traditional medicinal treatment is done with herbal medicines, animal body parts and minerals. Non-drug treatment is carried out with various techniques. These include acupuncture and similar techniques, chiropractic, osteopathy, manual therapies, qigong, yoga and other regimens, spiritual and mind-body therapies ^[54].

Most traditional medicine practitioners prepare formulas according to their own recipes and offer them to their patients. Approximately 40% of the population in Western countries, resorts to herbal medicine in treatment of various diseases ^[55]. Traditional medicine is increasingly attracting the attention of researchers and governments due to the increasing side effects, adverse drug reactions, and cost of modern medicine, thus expanding interest in traditional medicine ^[56].

The factors believed to have healing powers in traditional medicine can be as diverse as herbs, medicinal plants, animal species, open fresh air, spring water or natural scenery. The pharmacopoeia of folk traditions is vast; medical systems such as Chinese, Ayurvedic, Unani and biomedicine all use thousands of medicines made from leaves, herbs, roots, barks, animals, minerals and other substances found in nature ^[57].

Conclusion

As one could see, the disciplines aiming to improve human health and well-being are diverse, and this diversity is growing with the birth of new disciplines, and disciplines are enriching as they continue to expand their scope to address emerging health risks. However, at least some of these disciplines are difficult to distinguish completely from each other. Several of them, such as general practice and traditional medicine, are more focused on one-on-one prevention and treatment, whereas others, like public health, disaster medicine and occupational medicine, are more community-oriented and focused on disease prevention.

Naturally, none of these disciplines, either individually or collectively, is a candidate to replace clinical medicine and surgery, but once in their rightful place, they have the potential to offer a worry-free life with unimaginable cost savings by drastically reducing the need for expensive medical or surgical interventions.

From professionals' point of view, unlike physicians and surgeons who spend their days in a doctor's office or surgery theater and hospital corridors, almost all of these disciplines are in a wide variety of settings, collaborating with different professions and layers of society, from politicians and community leaders to psychologists and engineers, and experiencing different environments. This creates a unique opportunity for job satisfaction.

While increasing acceptability by policymakers, clinicians, and communities is a major challenge for these disciplines, field conflicts may be another potential risk. These challenges can be overcome by continuously exploring new avenues of advocacy and cooperation. As these disciplines prove to policy makers, clinicians and the general population that they are indispensable for human health and well-being, their place in the health care sector will thrive and consolidate.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declares no competing or conflict of interest and no any financial disclosures.

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