

Global Health Education and Latin America

Thomas L. Hall

Department of Epidemiology & Biostatistics, University of California at San Francisco, San Francisco, California, United States of America.
Educational Consultant, Consortium of Universities for Global Health.
E-mail: thall143@comcast.net

Received: 29-10-2013.

Accepted: 06-11-2013.

Educación en Salud Global y América Latina

I am writing to commend your Journal for its fine work of informing its readership of the important developments occurring in the health sciences. For eight years I lived and worked in Latin America, including time spent in Colombia working with colleagues to estimate future requirements for health personnel. I became acquainted with the journal through a recent collaboration with Prof. Alfonso J. Rodriguez-Morales and a student, Mr. Daniel Tobon Garcia, in the drafting of a book that will soon be published to provide guidance to students and faculty committed to improving their academic programs as they relate to global health. This much expanded 2nd edition, *Developing Global Health Programming: A Guidebook for Medical and Professional Schools*, will soon be available both in printed and online format.

The importance of training health profession students to have the knowledge, skills and experiences that they will require to address effectively the health care needs of the future is becoming ever more evident. Health care providers must address not only the specific complaints of individual patients but also the many and profound 'upstream' risk factors such as poverty, marginalization, unhealthy behaviors, limited education, cultural barriers, etc., that contribute to illness, and with the resource and organizational constraints that limit the effectiveness of the health systems within which they work.

To address these concerns The Lancet and several foundations convened a Commission of 20 distinguished health authorities from around the world to take a comprehensive look at the problems faced by health educational and health care systems, and to make recommendations for reform. Their mandate was to "develop a shared vision and a common strategy for postsecondary education in medicine, nursing, and public health that reaches beyond the confines of national borders and the silos of individual professions." In December, 2010, the report of the Commission, co-chaired by the former Minister of Health of Mexico, Julio Frenk, was published by The Lancet ("Health professionals for a new century: transforming education to strengthen health systems in an interdependent world"; The Lancet, Volume 376, Issue 9756, Pages 1923 - 1958, 4 December 2010) (1) (a Spanish version is available too) (2).

In its review the Commission noted that two generations of educational reforms took place during the past century. Starting in the early 1900s emphasis was given to a science-based curriculum, and around mid-century, problem-based instructional innovations were introduced. The Commission now calls for a third educational generation that is systems based and which seeks "to improve the performance of health systems by adapting core professional competencies to specific contexts, while drawing on global knowledge." The Report and its five commissioned papers provide a rich source of

information about the characteristics and deficiencies of the current educational establishment, in rich and poor countries alike, to address emerging health needs. Ten major reforms are recommended, seven instructional and three institutional, to address the many deficiencies in the current educational system. Through the publication of the full report the Commission hopes to stimulate a global debate, and subsequent action, to equip future health professionals to cope with the many challenges ahead.

My letter is not the place to attempt a summary of the many findings and recommendations of the Commission and very possibly your Journal has already made reference to it. However, the Commission's message is so important, and its recommendations can so profoundly affect professional training and deployment, that it is well worth calling your readers attention to this document and encouraging its review. Colombia has a long and rich tradition of providing quality professional education, and of being one of the leaders in health education and delivery in Latin America. These are exciting times in the field of professional health education – new approaches to teaching, new educational resources via the internet and online courses, and a much more profound appreciation of the global realities that affect health, disease, and the delivery of health care. I hope that Colombia will continue to lead by taking to heart the Commission's report and adapting its findings to the realities of modern day Colombia.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

References

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