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Title: Next generation of public health professionals: networks and the EUPHANxt integration approach

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Main text

In a commentary by Louise Boyle and Sofia Ribeiro, the authors urge on the importance of young professional networks in public health to train them on leadership competencies in a vibrant, international and multidisciplinary atmosphere.¹ The Young Forum Gastein initiative is proposed then by the authors as an important tool and network to interact with high-level European health experts. In the past 20 years, giant strides have been made in terms of integration among citizens from different European countries, and new challenges for health sector are continuously arising, such as societal changes, patient-centred care, globalization, more assertive and informed patients.² These challenges bare particularly true considering how the economic crisis and increasing budgetary constraints have put additional pressures on health systems, with consequent reduced health spending in several countries.³ It is important, therefore, that the future public health professionals will be ready to deal with these evolving dares. As promoted in Health 2020 by Zsuzsanna Jakab, the Director of the Regional Office of World Health Organization for Europe, the contribution of the next generations of public health professionals is unquestionably fundamental to work together for health and well-being in the European Region, to strengthen leadership for health and to invest in governance for health and well-being that reflects the realities and needs of the 21st century.⁴ Further, in his editorial, 'Seven goals for public health training in the 21st century', Martin McKee highlighted the need to prepare people to engage actively in a complex and changing world in ways that improve the health of the population.⁵

In this regard, the European Public Health Association (EUPHA), as claimed by its President Walter Ricciardi, thinks that 'the role of public health professionals as the independent conscience of planetary health fits perfectly within the future strategy of EUPHA, where investing in a future generation of connected and engaged public health professionals is one of the priorities'.⁶ Hence, it is important to continuously invest in the next generation to ensure an independent and competent workforce for the years ahead. However, it is crucial not only to establish such young professional networks and train them with the essential skills and competencies but also to integrate the next generation of public health professionals into existing more traditional networks and the current public health workforce to provide the full public health community with new ideas and insights.

In 2011, EUPHA launched the initiative EUPHANxt to collect the active contribution of students, young and early career researchers, practitioners and policymakers interested in European public health issues, to sensitize and involve them into the European and multi-disciplinary network of public health associations. Since its creation, EUPHANxt has grown into a network with over 700 subscribers and keeps working to achieve the same aims considered by McKee's proposal.⁵

As McKee recommended, EUPHANxt plays a pivotal role in this field, both connecting its subscribers in professional and social meetings during the annual conferences and collaborating with several associations, main forums and networks for young students, researchers and practitioners with an interest in public health, regardless to the specific study background.⁴

For this reason, EUPHANxt has established networks with multidisciplinary associations, such as the International Sociological Association, the European Federation of Psychology Students' Association and the International Federation of Medical Students' Association. Additionally, a structured programme of international internship exchanges for early-career professionals will be implemented to stimulate the mobilization and the transfer of knowledge and competencies among European countries. Another goal suggested by McKee, is represented by the requirement of support for young professionals in engaging with experts and key decision-makers.⁵

EUPHANxt promotes this intergenerational knowledge-sharing through the EUPHA network, as also done by the Young Forum Gastein. It brings together researchers and public health professionals working in the same field for the exchange of information and the setting up of joint policies, reports and research. The EUPHA network with its sections and cross-pillars, goes further and provides the early career professionals durable and broad infrastructure for networking, collaboration and full integration. For this reason, the new proposed strategy of EUPHA planned a

mission aimed at the younger generations, their inclusion in existing networks and the use of their 'fresh' look at public health to further develop European and national public health. Through EUPHANxt, it provides the next generation of public health professionals with the opportunity to continuously interact with a more experienced generation, and hence create together unconventional ideas for public health challenges in an increasingly faster changing world.

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