

Transformative learning in Public Health – using a Dragon’s Den approach

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Engaging medical students in public health

Over the previous decade, there has been increasing interest in engaging medical students in public health through undergraduate curriculum (Gillam & Maudsley, 2008; PHEMS, 2014). Public health in the UK is commonly described as “the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through organised efforts of society” and,

“The science of public health is therefore concerned with making a diagnosis of a population’s health problems, establishing the causes and effects of those problems, and determining effective interventions. The art of public health is to create, advocate for, and use opportunities to implement effective solutions to population health and health care problems.” (Gillam & Maudsley, 2008, p. 3).

An article in *Medical Teachers* published earlier this year suggested four innovative approaches for engaging medical students in public health (Vyas et al, 2017). Furthermore, building on Frenk et al (2010), the authors describe achieving **transformative learning** as,

“cognisant of social justice concerns, imparts leadership attributes, and recognizes the interdependence at the heart of the medical profession and healthcare systems in the 21st century.”

There are many synergies with what both descriptions cited above are aiming to achieve. Therefore, with these definitions in mind, and building on Vyas et al, we describe the use of a Dragon’s Den style Public Health pitch as an example of transformative learning and of engaging medical students in the art and science of public health.

A year of Public Health Dragon’s Den Pitches

In the BBC television programme, The Dragon’s Den, inventors and start-up companies pitch for investment in their idea from investors who scrutinise their proposal. Similarly, a public health pitch is required to convince a sceptical audience that there is an unmet need, that the intervention will work and will deliver public health benefit.

Over a two-week period, final year medical students individually research and develop a structured five minute “pitch” justifying a public health intervention for an identified health problem in a specified locality. Their pitch includes a description of the population and its health status, a description of the health problem and why it is important, a description of the intervention and evidence for its effectiveness, an estimate of the benefit from the intervention, and a description of how the intervention will be monitored.

We reviewed 259 student “pitches” from November 2016 to October 2017. The findings demonstrated an interest in a diversity of places, people, public health problems and potential solutions and approaches. Examples of these are illustrated to the right.

We believe that the Dragon’s Den pitch approach in public health teaching is an innovative example of transformative learning, as described in Vyas et al (2017). It not only draws on students’ epidemiology and research skills, but aims to encourage reflection on social justice concerns that are central to many public health concerns, raise awareness of the importance of public health advocacy and leadership, and the recognition of the interdependence of medicine, healthcare systems and wider sectors, organisations and institutions locally and globally.

References

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Main countries



Main conditions



Solutions and approaches

Word clouds created at wordart.com

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