

Abstract Title:

Training dietitians as clinical public health practitioners

Rana H¹, Hobson A²¹⁻²Dalla Lana School of Public Health (DLSPH), University of Toronto, Toronto, ON.

Purpose: *Clinical public health* (CPH) is the integration of primary care, preventive medicine, and public health into health-care practice. Academics and practitioners have called for revitalized health education programs to meet the needs of the changing health-care landscape. DLSPH at the University of Toronto responded with a novel approach to training its students as ‘transdisciplinary’ CPH professionals. The Masters of Public Health in Nutrition & Dietetics (MPH-ND) (formerly the Master of Community Nutrition) was the first program to use this pedagogical approach to train students pursuing Registered Dietitian credentials. Program coordinators formed key partnerships with Toronto Public Health and University Health Network hospitals to facilitate practica. Two recent graduates (new dietitians) share key aspects of their experiences in the first cohort of students in the CPH-based curriculum.

Summary of Process: Seventeen students (including both authors) in the inaugural class of the MPH-ND underwent this innovative training approach. Faculty and students met regularly during the first year to discuss the program curriculum and practica, with open dialogue between faculty and students on the opportunities and challenges of the new format. At year end, students independently researched a single dietetic issue from across the continuum of care to apply their CPH learning. Students highlighted diverse issues and demonstrated their acquired understanding of and commitment to systems-thinking and CPH in nutrition.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Students felt more competent as systems thinkers, and were able to brainstorm innovative CPH solutions. The MPH-ND program is graduating its first cohort in June 2017. We recommend:

- Evaluating the experience of graduates to ascertain how their innovative training contributed to their careers and what could make the training stronger.
- Using evaluation findings to improve the curriculum and practica for future cohorts
- Developing a sustainable framework to implement in dietetic training programs across Canada.