



## **COVID-19 lessons learned: Public health research should be integrated into medical school curricula**

## **COVID-19 leçons apprises : la recherche en santé publique devrait être intégrée dans les programmes des écoles de médecine**

Ponn P Mahayosnand , Samiha Ahmed , Diana Mora Bermejo and ZM Sabra 

Volume 15, Number 1, 2024

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1110461ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36834/cmej.77594>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Medical Education Journal

ISSN

1923-1202 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Mahayosnand, P., Ahmed, S., Mora Bermejo, D. & Sabra, Z. (2024). COVID-19 lessons learned: Public health research should be integrated into medical school curricula. *Canadian Medical Education Journal / Revue canadienne de l'éducation médicale*, 15(1), 93–94. <https://doi.org/10.36834/cmej.77594>

© Ponn P Mahayosnand, Samiha Ahmed, Diana Mora Bermejo and ZM Sabra, 2024



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

## COVID-19 lessons learned: public health research should be integrated into medical school curricula

### COVID-19 leçons apprises : la recherche en santé publique devrait être intégrée dans les programmes des écoles de médecine

Ponn P Mahayosnand,<sup>1</sup> Samiha Ahmed, Diana Mora Bermejo, ZM Sabra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ronin Institute. Ronin Institute for Independent Scholarship, New Jersey, USA; <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of Gaza, Gaza, Palestine  
Correspondence to: Ponn P Mahayosnand, MPH. Ronin Institute. Ronin Institute for Independent Scholarship. 127 Haddon Pl. Montclair, NJ 07043-2314; email: ponn.mahayosnand@ronininstitute.org; phone: +1.203-493-1345; fax: +1.310-794-0988.

Published ahead of issue: Feb 15, 2024; published: Feb 29, 2024. CMEJ 2024, 15(1) Available at <https://doi.org/10.36834/cmej.77594>

© 2024 Mahayosnand, Ahmed, Mora Bermejo, Sabra, ; licensee Synergies Partners. This is an Open Journal Systems article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need to strengthen the public health sector alongside our clinical health approach. Clinical care treats individual patients, while public health looks at diseases at a population level. This broader approach of understanding how diseases spread and how we can work towards healthier communities should be seen as equally important to clinical sciences.<sup>1</sup> Had the gap in public health research data been regularly addressed in times of health emergencies, such as during this pandemic, this data and its methods could have been readily available and adaptable. Instead, the issues of lacking public health data resulted in the haste call for it. Within public health research, there is also a need for data that is pertinent and inclusive of different communities that may face the spread of disease differently, such as by ethnicity or geographic location.<sup>2</sup>

Medical students add much value to the field of public health research when given the opportunity. In New Zealand, The Dunedin School of Medicine fielded a mandatory research training program, Trainee Intern Health Care Evaluation, for their medical students.<sup>3</sup> From the total of 227 projects created by students observed under this program, there were 19 articles written, three conference presentations created, four abstracts that were cited in other reports, and 22 peer-reviewed publications. Following these observations, Al-Busaidi and Tarr suggest that mandatory research programs such as these can

motivate medical students to pursue research and more academic endeavors. With more researchers and minds working on health issues, the field may be further enriched.

With the growing focus on a more well-rounded and creative approach to medicine, there should be more focus on teaching and integrating the concepts of population health, preventative medicine, and health policy, all of which shape the administration and needs of health care in the population.<sup>1</sup> Some academic institutions, such as St. James Medical School, truly believes that more research experience leads to physicians who “provide better care to patients.”<sup>4</sup> Given this belief, it is becoming an increasingly valued skill in graduating medical students and may even give them a competitive edge when looking for postgraduate positions. It is important for medical schools to give students these research opportunities while still in school to build essential skills that can help them continue research work after they graduate.

The benefits of public health research have been observed in UK medical schools.<sup>5</sup> Teaching leads at various UK medical universities were surveyed after implementing a public health curriculum. The study was structured so that every university taught a public health course in the first year; 1 school stopped teaching after Year 2 while 2 schools stopped after Year 3 and roughly 40% of schools opted to teach public health in the final year. As a part of the curriculum, students had the opportunity to pursue a public health research project for core or elective program

credit. The surveys found that students wanted more qualified and trained teachers in public health, noting current shortages. Medical students have the desire and are seeking exposure to or, at the very least, education in the field of public health.

It is important to bring students and research opportunities together, and one of the most effective strategies to accomplish this is to use Open Data Science (ODS) principles and their global practitioners who willingly conduct remote research and e-mentor interested students. Implementing ODS research principles also helps in taking advantage of more widely available resources and global educational models since they are freely accessible. Applying ODS principles may help maximize these opportunities without straining the resources of current programs. With the shifts toward ODS already occurring, medical schools should jump at the opportunity to give their students the chance to acquire practical skills crucial to the practice of medicine on a global scale.

Overall, a more collaborative curriculum incorporating public health research and traditional medical education will be greatly beneficial to medical students and the care of their patients. Public health research opportunities can take the form of a hands-on, not solely theoretical, public health research class, a formal research field experience, or an informal e-mentorship relationship with global ODS public health researchers. This pandemic proves to be an ideal time to implement such curricula adaptations. While the fields of ODS, remote research, and e-mentoring are

booming, general amendments to and the integration of public health research into medical school curricula should be encouraged as they will only improve the education and training of future physicians.

**Conflicts of Interest:** None declared.

**Funding:** None

**Edited by:** Marcel D'Eon (Editor-in-Chief)

## References

1. Finkel ML. Integrating the public health component into the medical school curriculum. *Public Health Rep.* 2012 Mar 1;127(2):145–6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003335491212700201>
2. Pareek M, Bangash MN, Pareek N, et al. Ethnicity and COVID-19: an urgent public health research priority. *Lancet.* Lond Engl. 2020 May 2;395(10234):1421–2. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30922-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30922-3)
3. Al-Busaidi IS, Tarr GP. Dissemination of results from medical student public health research training and factors associated with publication. *Postgrad Med J.* 2018 Jun;94(1112):330–4. <https://doi.org/10.1136/postgradmedj-2017-135361>
4. Saint James School of Medicine. *Why research is important for medical students.* Available from: <https://www.sjsm.org/2019/07/why-research-is-important-for-medical-students/>. [Accessed Sep 28, 2021].
5. Lyon AK, Hothersall EJ, Gillam S. Teaching public health in UK medical schools: “things have improved: teaching no longer feels like an expensive hobby.” *J Public Health. Oxf Engl.* 2016 Sep;38(3):e309–15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdv127>