

Proposal for Improved Translation and Meaning of “Public Health” in the Republic of Macedonia

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Abstract

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The translation and use of the term “public health” in the Republic of Macedonia creates confusions among students, professionals and the public. Its use and meaning in Macedonian language is associated more to the ownership over the healthcare system by the state, rather than to explain the primary goal and mission of public health to protect, promote and restore the health of the public. There is a need to clarify, change and standardize the use of this terminology in the Republic of Macedonia. Medical Faculty in Skopje should take leadership by introducing this change in the public health curriculum of the postgraduate studies.

Introduction

Public health over the past decade has become very popular field for further professional and academic career development in the Republic of Macedonia. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe has supported development of public health teaching modules and initiated close collaboration between the public health professionals from the region, including experts from Macedonia [1,2]. Furthermore, joint academic collaboration between the Medical Faculty in Skopje and Braun School of Public Health and Community Medicine, from the Hebrew

University-Hadassah in Jerusalem, Israel additionally increased the popularity of the public health studies in the country [3, 4]. The New Public Health textbook was translated into the Macedonian language and is used as a basic textbook for the Master of Public Health (MPH) students [5].

The Open Society Institute (OSI) supported this collaboration and in three subsequent years four graduates from Macedonia have completed Master of Public Health Studies, and earned internationally recognized MPH degrees. The collaboration went on further towards

development and official opening of the Center of Public Health at the Medical Faculty in Skopje in 2003 [6]. So far there have been seven generations of master of public health studies attended by 215 students, of whom 24 had completed the studies. Most of these students remain to work in the health care system, but there are also students who pursued their careers in the private sector as well as internationally.

The interest for public health studies in Macedonia is growing not only among the graduates coming from the medical backgrounds, but also from other fields such as economy, sociology, pedagogy, etc. The popularity of the Center of Public Health was increased with the delivery of Health Management Leadership and Training Program, developed in collaboration between the Ministry of Health, the Medical Faculty in Skopje and the Project Coordination Unit of the World Bank. This program is aimed to training of doctors, as well as economists (health managers) seeking appointments as directors of the public health institutions.

However, over the whole process of development of public health education in Macedonia a problem that prevails and creates confusion among professional and wider public is the translation of real meaning of the term “public health” and its confusion with rather different term “public healthcare”. So far there have been several attempts to introduce correct translation and proper definition of the term “public health” in R. Macedonia [7, 8]. However, these definitions did not initiate change of already established Macedonian terminology for public health at the Medical Faculty in Skopje. The trend of incorrect translations was initiated with the Macedonian translation of the New Public Health textbook in 2003 (Novoto Javno Zdravstvo) [5], and further advanced with the publication of the Public Health Dictionary in the Macedonian language, titled as “Tolkovnik po Javno Zdravstvo” (Public healthcare dictionary/glosary) [9].

It seems that roots of this confusion in translations and interpretation can be traced back with the establishment of the Ministry of Health, in Macedonian as “Ministerstvo za zdravstvo” (Ministry of healthcare) and not as “Ministerstvo za zdravje” (Ministry of health). In 2006 there was policy initiative to change the established translation of the Ministry of Health in Macedonia [10]. However, this conceptual change was only implemented in renaming of the Republic Institute of Public Protection (Republički zavod za zdravstvena zastita), to Institute of Public Health (Institut za javno zdravje) [11].

Health, Public Health and Healthcare (zdravje, javno zdravje i zdravstvo)

To understand this confusion and to make it clear for the wider audience in Macedonia, there is a need to elaborate and distinguish between the differences in the meaning of “health”, “public health” and “healthcare”.

According to the most popular definition established by World Health Organization, in its founding charter in 1946, that health is a “state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” [12]. There have been many criticisms to this definition, but it is still the most widely cited definition. John Last in his dictionary of epidemiology uses few other definitions [13] “A state characterized health by “anatomic, physiologic and physiologic and psychologic integrity; ability to perform personally valued family, work and community roles; ability to deal with physical, biologic, psychological and social stress; a feeling of well-being; and freedom from the risk of disuses and untimely death” [14]. Health has also been defined as “A state of equilibrium between humans and the physical, biologic and social environment, compatible with full functional activity” [15]. Whatever of these definitions of health is used, it makes clear to the reader that the notion of “health” refers to the wellbeing and absence of diseases to the individuals or populations.

The most widely used definition of public health is “public health is one of the efforts organized by the society to protect, promote and restore the people’s health” [13]. This definition does not specifically refer to public health as merely a branch of medicine, in possession of the medical profession. But quite on the contrary, this definition provides broader concept that extends beyond the scope of medical or healthcare system.

In contrast, the term “healthcare”, or “zdravstvo” refers to the prevention, treatment, and management of illness and preservation of mental and physical well-being through the services offered by the medical and allied health professions [16]. Thus when speaking of healthcare, one refers to the system of services, providers and financing systems related to personal and population health services, and not on the notion of health per se.

In the Macedonian language, the English word health is translated as “zdravje”, and there is no confusion in its meaning and understanding when used independently. The problem in translations begins when the term health is used in connection to other words such as “Ministry of Health”, “Public health” or “School of public health”. For example the term “public health” in Macedonian

is translated as "javno zdravstvo". Than "health" becomes "zdravstvo" such as the cases of "Ministerstvo za zdravstvo", "Javno zdravstvo" or "Shkolo za javno zdravstvo". We present the current translation of selected terms, and proposal for change in Table 1.

Table 1: Proposal for improved translation of selected terms.

English word	Macedonian translation in current use	Proposals for change
Public Health	Javno zdravstvo	Javno (narodno) zdravje
School/Center of public health	Shkolo/Centar za javno zdravstvo	Shkolo/Centar za javno zdravje
Ministry of health	Ministerstvo za zdravstvo	Ministerstvo za zdravje
Institute of Public Health	Republički zavod za zdravstvena zaštita	Institut za javno zdravje*
Master of public health	Magister po javno zdravstvo	Magister po javno zdravje
PhD in public health	Doktor na nauki po javno zdravstvo	Doktor na nauki po javno zdravje
Public health dictionary/glossary	Javno zdravstvo/Tolkovnik	Javno zdravje/Tolkovnik
New Public Health	Novoto Javno Zdravstvo	Novoto Javno Zdravje
Public healthcare	Javno zdravstvo (zdravstvena zaštita)	Javno zdravstvo

*Amendments in the Law for health protection enacted this change in 2009.

The key problem with existing translation of public health in Macedonian is that is very often simultaneously used to refer to public funding and ownership of the health care system, and not to explain the broad concept and context of public health as a social institution, discipline and practice [17]. Sarkanjac recently argued that the concept of public health in Macedonia was overtaken by the medical context, which he had termed as "the medicalization of the public health" [18].

Conclusions

It is important to distinguish between public health and the system of services for delivery of medical care. The existing translation and use of the term "public health" does not correspond to its real meaning and it creates confusions with public ownership of the healthcare system. We propose therefore to introduce an improved translation of the term public health in Macedonia that should be used in all further publications and translations in Macedonian language. The Medical Faculty in Skopje and the Center of Public Health should lead the way in changing the longstanding translation by introducing the term "javno zdravje" while talking of public health. This change would more appropriately explain the proper meaning and broad concept of public health to the population that extends beyond the boundaries of medicine per se.

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