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Using the Framework of Entrustable Professional Activities to Assess Readiness among Master in Public Health Students

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ABSTRACT

Entrustable professional activities (EPAs) play a pivotal role in the delivery of competency-based education, as they enable the operationalization of complex competencies into measurable activities that are relevant to real-world practice. Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) developed for the Master of Public Health (MPH) program play a critical role in determining students' readiness for independent practice. The integration of EPAs into the MPH curriculum necessitates systematic planning and implementation to ensure alignment with the program's overarching goals and competencies. It is important to acknowledge the distinctive nature of EPAs in MPH programs, which differ significantly from those associated with clinical disciplines. In conclusion, EPAs play a defining role in preparing MPH students for effective and independent practice in public health. There is an immense need to adopt a systematic approach to integrate EPA into the program curriculum and thereby equip MPH students with the desired competencies to make meaningful contributions.

Keywords: Competency-based education, curriculum, education, health

INTRODUCTION

Entrustable professional activities (EPAs) play a pivotal role in the delivery of competency-based education, as they enable the operationalization of complex competencies into measurable activities that are relevant to real-world practice.^[1] In other words, EPAs refer to specific activities that can be entrusted to students once they have acquired the desired knowledge and skills.^[2] This approach advocates the delivery of student-centered education, wherein students take responsibility for their learning and make conscious efforts to attain the set competencies within the pre-defined timeframe.^[3] In fact, as students are assessed for their performance on framed EPAs, teachers get an opportunity to provide constructive feedback, monitor their progress, and thereby make a decision regarding their ability to perform the task independently (entrustment).^[1-3]

EPAS ASSESSING THE READINESS FOR INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Master in Public Health (MPH) is an academic program designed to prepare students for their careers in the domain of public health, research, policy-making, and leadership.^[4] EPAs framed for the MPH program become crucial to take a call regarding the readiness of students to in-

independently practice. This readiness can be ascertained by measuring the ability of students to effectively contribute to public health practice. The decision to allow MPH graduates to independently practice will depend on a number of indicators, such as the ability to deliver quality-assured public health services to positively influence health indicators of the general population, being accountable and responsible for their actions, and ensuring patient safety and welfare by implementing evidence-driven public health measures.^[4-6] In addition, the students must also demonstrate problem-solving and critical decision-making skills, which happens to be crucial for effective public health practice.^[6]

The framed EPAs give the opportunity to equip students with the leadership skills required to initiate and lead a wide range of public health interventions independently.^[7] In continuation, students must develop the competency to effectively and efficiently collaborate with various stakeholders (namely, health professionals from different streams, communities, program managers, policymakers, etc.).^[4] As students will be exposed to a number of real-world scenarios, they will be assessed for their adaptability to change and make ethical decisions in different contexts.^[1] As EPAs have to be periodically assessed, the students are assessed for their readiness continuously, and it also enables a positive learning environment and professional development.^[1,2] Moreover, EPAs can also assess the readiness of students to create a positive impact on the communities through effective public health interventions.^[4]

INTEGRATING EPAS IN THE MPH CURRICULUM

The act of integrating EPAs into the MPH curriculum essentially requires systematic planning and implementation to ensure alignment with the overall goals and competencies of the program.^[8-11] The process begins with the identification of key public health competencies and skills related to program planning, epidemiology, health promotion, etc.^[4,8] This should be followed by the development of EPAs that are in alignment with the identified competencies and should be developed by involving different stakeholders.^[9] Along similar lines, teachers can also incorporate EPAs that require the need for students to collaborate with other health professionals to promote teamwork and interdisciplinary practice.^[10] The next step will be to align EPAs with the curriculum and learning objectives in such a way that the entire curriculum is covered.^[4] Teachers must look to develop case studies and simulation exercises depending on the framed EPAs with the ultimate intention of providing exposure to authentic learning experiences, which enables the application of public health skills.^[3,4]

For each of the framed EPAs, specific workplace-based assessment tools are used to assess the progress of students.^[11] There is always a possibility to include portfolio-based assessments to compile evidence about their performance.^[12] Moreover, there is always a possibility to use technology-enabled platforms and simulation tools to mimic public health scenarios and assess the performance of students. There is an indispensable need for each of the performances by students to be followed up with the provision of constructive feedback to help them identify their strengths and areas that need more attention.^[11] Further, MPH students should also be encouraged to record their reflections on their experiences, which enables lifelong learning and professional growth.^[13] Finally, there has to be a mechanism to track the performance of students toward the attainment of EPAs throughout the duration of the program.^[4]

ASSESSMENT OF EPAS IN THE MPH PROGRAM

Considering the variable nature of EPAs in MPH programs which are quite different as compared to the clinical subjects-related EPAs.^[13,14] These assessment tools could be either workplace-based assessment tools that are employed in real-world settings (such as direct observation and case-based discussions) or tools that can be used in simulated settings (such as standardized patient encounters and objective structured clinical examinations).^[13] In addition, tools such as portfolio-based assessments, peer assessment, and multisource feedback can also be employed to assess a wide range of competencies among MPH students.^[4,13] These assessment methods can be either used in isolation or in combination to holistically assess the accomplishment of intended competencies by the MPH students, thereby making a decision regarding the readiness for independent practice.^[13,14]

CONCLUSION

EPAs play a defining role in preparing Master of Public Health students for effective and independent practice in public health. There is an immense need to adopt a systematic approach to integrate EPA into the program curriculum and thereby equip MPH students with the desired competencies to make meaningful contributions.

Disclosures

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