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PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Jarvis et al (2020) define Public Health as an art and science whose organised efforts aim to prevent illness and disease as well as to protect and promote health within the society. This is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching diseases and responding to infectious diseases. The CDC Foundation (2024) add that Public Health professionals try to prevent problems from happening or recurring through implementing educational programs, recommending policies, administering services and conducting research.

Public Health is important because it improves our quality of life, helps children thrive, reduces human suffering and saves money (APH 2024).

Jarvis et al (2020: 6) in their report clarify the definition of integration, as the relationship between public health and health care and the extent to which services are provided to promote and achieve health. The authors further explain that potential benefits of integration include bringing a population health perspective to the health care system, increased access to care and the reduction of direct and indirect health costs.

There has been a change in health needs of populations. Increasing knowledge of ones' rights, and the promotion of democracy have raised peoples' expectations regarding health. Today, people expect access to health in some form and increasingly demand for measures to protect the sick and their families against the financial costs of ill-health. Awareness of the

impact on health of industrialisation, environmental damage, road transport, and globalization has broadened the sphere of activity of health systems.

Health Systems are the people, institutions and resources arranged together in accordance with established policies, to improve the health of the population they serve. The health care also responds to peoples' legitimate expectations and protecting the against the cost of ill health through a variety of activities whose primary intent is to improve health (Community Medicine 4all 2020).

Public health works together with the health care industry. Public health aims to prevent people from getting sick or injured in the first place, while the health care industry treats people who are sick. Public health focuses on the entire population, while the health care industry focuses on individual patients (CDC Foundation 2024).

In this essay I will deliberate briefly about Public Health and Health care systems. I will explain how the health care systems can be improved including much protection it offers to people from financial risk and responds to their expectations. This will also cover the problems with access to health care and the organisations involved in public health.

My opinions and analysis of the course concepts will be discussed. I will also explain how I will apply the knowledge I have gained from this course at the workplace, in life or community. Lastly, I will share my personal experiences in my community and work place.

## **Summary of the topic**

In this section I will explain briefly about Public Health and Health Care systems

### **The Public Health Systems**

According to Lumen Learning Public Health Systems are all the public, private, and voluntary entities that contribute to the delivery of essential public health services within a jurisdiction. This concept ensures that all entities contributions to the health and wellbeing of the community or state are recognized in assessing the provision of public health services. On the other hand, Jarvis et al (2020:3) defines public health systems as all levels of governmental and non-governmental entities, which share in the responsibility for ensuring healthy social and physical environment consisting of variety of organizations that contribute to the core functions of public health to protect and promote health within the community

The public health system includes; Public health agencies at state and local levels, Public safety agencies, Health care providers, Human service and charity organizations, Education and youth development organizations, Recreation and arts-related organizations, Environmental agencies and organization and Economic and philanthropic organizations. All these organizations share a common goal of preventing occurrence of diseases, promoting and maintaining health of the communities.

### **Functions of Public Health**

Public health professionals work hard to ensure health living conditions for the people in their communities. This involves conducting scientific research, developing evidence-based programs and interventions, educating the public about health-related topics, aiding in policy development and more (Fairfield University News).

### Assessment

This core attribute of public health is important because assessment provides organizations with comprehensive information about a community's current health status, needs and challenges. Such information can be key in developing community health improvements plans, determining how resources should be allocated and more. This core function is carried out by monitoring the health status of the population, the factors that influence health and community needs and assets. Also by investigating diagnosis and addressing health problems and hazards affecting the population (Fairfield University News).

### Policy development

Fairfield University News proposes that policy development can be one of the most effective ways to improve the health of the communities and public health professionals plays a very important role in the process of policy development. They may conduct policy analyses, develop key community partnerships and help promote and implement evidence based interventions. This core function includes the following essential services;

Communicating effectively to inform and educate people about health, factors that influence it and how to improve it, strengthening, supporting, and mobilizing communities and

partnerships to improve environmental health, and creating, championing and implementing policies, plans and laws that impact community health.

### Assurance

This final core function of public health is focused on ensuring the findings gathered through assessment and policy-related research are effectively implemented. Professionals in this realm are responsible for the allocation of resources, be they supplies or equipment or properly trained employees (Fairfield University News). This core function is carried out by utilizing legal and regulatory actions designed to improve and protect the public health,

ensuring an effective system that enables equitable access to the individual services and core needed to be healthy, developing and supporting a diverse and skilled public health workforce, improving an innovating public health functions through ongoing evaluation, research, and continuous quality improvement, and building and maintaining a strong organizational infrastructure for public health.

### **Health care systems**

Community Medicine (2020) describe the Health care systems as all the activities whose primary purpose is to promote, restore or maintain health. This includes formal health services, actions by traditional healers and all use of medication, whether prescribed by a provider or not; home care of the sick, health-enhancing interventions like road and environmental safety improvement, health related education, actions to increase girls' school enrolment or change the curriculum to make students better caregivers and consumers or health care.

Health care systems consists of all organizations, institutions and resources that are strongly committed to producing health actions. The health care systems aim at improving the health of the population they serve, respond to peoples' expectations and providing financial protection against the costs of ill-health. Community medicine (2020) clarify that these objectives are not always met and results in widespread public dissatisfaction with the way health services are run or financed.

## **Health systems strengthening**

Health systems strengthening roughly means to improve the health care structure. Health systems do need to be strengthened in order to advance the quality of health care, thus promoting the health of the whole population. Health systems strengthening involves different dimensions.

A well-functioning health system working in harmony is built on having trained and motivated health workers, a well-maintained infrastructure, and a reliable supply of medicines and technologies, backed by adequate funding, strong health plans and evidence-based policies. According to Global Health Council (2023) health systems strengthening comprises of the policies, and processes that improve equity, efficiency, quality, accessibility, or effectiveness within the health system. Health systems strengthening bridge from the national to the community level and is central to countries 'self-reliance. With strong health systems countries can provide care for their citizens to thrive and engage in education and productive work that encourages economic development.

Strong health systems provide access to affordable, essential, and quality services for all.

Health systems are the institutions, resources and people focused on improving health including hospitals, health workers, pharmaceuticals, supplies, governance structures and financial and information systems (Global Health Council 2023).

[How to improve Access to Health Care?](#)

USC (2023) implies that when patients have access to health care they are empowered to build beneficial relationships with providers and ultimately manage and overcome illness and injury. Without that access, people live with undue pain and conditions that tend to worsen



over time. When health care is accessible, complications of patients' conditions can be minimised because people will seek medical help in time.

Below I will discuss the challenges which deny people to access health care and the possible solutions which will eventually improve access to health care.

#### *Problems with Access to Health Care*

Health care is not equally accessible across the country. I will deliberate on these three major problems that can prevent individuals and families from accessing care.

#### *Transportation barriers*

Transportation barriers significantly impact whether people have access to health care such as able to make it to their medical appointments. People living in rural where public transportation and internet services might be limited may need to travel far distances to receive care (USC 2023). The author add that even those who can drive must take time off work and spend money or petrol to access treatment and care. This quickly becomes

challenging for those living with chronic illnesses who need regular care. So, this means many are left without the access of care they need. Transportation issue affect people in suburban and rural regions as well. People with mobility challenges may have a difficult time leaving their homes o access care and providers located in areas with inadequate public transportation may be inaccessible for lower-income patients who do not own vehicles.

To address this issue of transportation due to geographic barriers and improve access to care, mobile clinics can be of use in the rural areas. Instead of travelling to a hospital many patients can now access care at mobile clinics closer to where they live and work (USC 2023). This will enable everyone to have access to health care as patients will have to travel a short

distance to the mobile clinics. The public need to be educated about multiple health care sites. Patients need better education about where they can and should seek care, depending on their symptoms (USC 2023). Some patients lack knowledge about less costly care facilities. Some patients seek emergency care or go to hospitals when it is not necessary and pay more money than they would have paid at a local clinic.

#### *Implicit bias and health care avoidance*

USC (2023) suggest that although there are many factors contributing to these disproportionately negative outcomes, one involves the way that people avoid interactions with health care providers, if they expect that they will experience discrimination and racial bias. People may not seek medical attention if they fear that they will be mistreated or otherwise disrespected by a medical professional.

To reduce this implicit bias in health care, leaders must continue to devote efforts to training staff in cultural competence and to creating policies that do not perpetuate racial bias.

Training the staff on customer care is very beneficial in improving the manner in which health professionals interact with people. Health care providers can take additional steps to ensure the comfort and well-being of their patients by getting to know their patients as people. At the beginning of a visit, providers should ask questions in a warm tone and offer opportunities for patients to share their concerns in a safe environment.

#### *High health care costs*

High out-of-pocket costs, even for patients with insurance, are a huge barrier to accessing health care (USC 2023). When people must choose between paying for food and rent or paying for health care, many forgo health care. It's an unacceptable choice disproportionately

forced onto people from low-income families. Rising costs for medical care are putting it out of reach for many. The economic situation of the country requires many people to turn away from needed health care just because of the cost. Below is the possible solution on how the health care system can reduce high health care costs.

How the health care systems protect the people from financial risk?

Rahman T. Gasbarro et al (2022) define financial risk protection as the ability to consume needed quality health care services without experiencing undue financial hardship. The authors clarify that a health system that protect people from financial risks ensures that the consumption of needed health care will improve their economic well-being.

Financial protection is at the core universal health coverage and is one of the final coverage goals of health financing policies. It is achieved when direct payments made to obtain health services do not expose people to financial hardship and do not threaten living standards (WHO 2020). The key to protecting people is to ensure prepayment and pooling of resources for health rather than relying on people paying for health services out of pocket at the time of use.

Health financing can be a key policy instrument to improve health and reduce health inequalities if its primary objectives is to facilitate hardship and catastrophic expenditure (WHO 2020). These activities can facilitate the outcomes; A system to raise sufficient funds for health fairly, a system to pool financial resources across population groups to share financial risks, and a financing governance system supported by relevant legislation, financial

audit and public expenditure to reviews, and clear operational rules to ensure efficient use of funds (WHO 2010).

### **How does the health care system respond to people's expectations?**

The WHO (2010) declare that a well-functioning system responds in a balanced way to a population's needs and expectations by, (1) Improving the health status of individuals, families and communities. (2) Defending the population against what threatens its health. (3) Protecting people against the financial consequences of ill-health. (4) Providing equitable access to people-centred care. (5) Making it possible to participate in decisions affecting their health system.

#### Human resources for health

A well performing workforce is one that is fair and efficient to achieve the best outcomes possible given available resources and circumstances. Development of health workforce include improving recruitment, education, training and distribution. This will enhance productivity and performance, and improving retention (WHO 2010). If there is enough staff who has knowledge on the job this will yield good quality of care and that is what people are expecting to get from health facilities.

#### Essential medical products and technologies

Universal access to health care is heavily dependent on access to affordable essential medicines, vaccines, diagnostics and health technologies of assured quality, which are used in a scientifically sound and cost-effective way. One of the key components of a functional

system is a supply and distribution system to ensure universal access to essential medical products and health technologies through public and private channels, with focus on the poor and disadvantaged (WHO 2010).

#### Service delivery

Health systems are only as effective as the service they provide. These depends on networks of close to-client primary care, organized as health districts or local area networks with the back-up of specialized and hospital services responsible for defined population.

Leadership should ask patient reviews to aid in identifying areas for improvement. Using the feedback create a strategy to implement change that will satisfy patients' needs and prioritize

investments in technology and modernization wherever possible. This includes services such as telehealth, access to patient portals, online check-in and other emerging capabilities (Health care under pressure 2023).

#### Leadership and governance

Common ingredients of good leadership and governance include ensuring that health authorities take responsibility for steering the entire health sector and for dealing with future challenges as well as with current problems (WHO 2010).

#### Health information systems

Good governance is only possible with good information on health challenges on the broader environment in which the health system operates and on the performance of the health system. This specifically includes progress in meeting health challenges and social objectives

including but not limited to household surveys, civil registration systems and epidemiological surveillance (WHO 2010).

All these five categories mentioned above, when exercised properly will yield good quality of health care. In this way the health care system will be able to meet people's expectations.

## **My opinion and analysis**

The public health systems have a major role in improving the health of the population. It is the responsibility of the public health systems to empower the nation with updated information about health so that the health of the population can be improved. Public health professionals are not confined to one role. They provide education and inform the public about health practices and preventive measures. They should aim to reach all the communities even the rural areas.

Today, the health care system suffers from low quality and high medical error rates (Yaneer Bar-Yam 2006). I agree with the author in that the shortage of staff in the health facilities has degrade the quality of care drastically. Health professionals no longer have that zeal to do their work. They do the work with less concentration which also leads to high rates of medical errors.

This leads to the point that the health care systems need to be improved in order to meet the people's expectations. Policy development can be one of the most effective ways to improve the health of communities (Fairfield University). Strong policies and processes should be put in place to guide and improve the quality and accessibility of care within the health systems. Resources should be made available for proper implementation of health care. When patients come to health facilities and does not get the required treatment fully because some supplies are not available, they become reluctant to seek medical help. This is because most of them do not have money to buy the needed supplies from private pharmacies as these pharmacies are very expensive. Some patients end up defaulting treatment and some delay coming to hospital when sick because of financial problem.

Public health and health care services should achieve their intended outcomes with least cost. As it is stated earlier that public health aim to prevent diseases and illness as well as to protect and promote health with the solicited (Jarvis et al 2020). This is done through diagnosis, planning, implementation and evaluation. For this objective to be accomplished the health professionals should be enough staff to do the job to prevent staff being overwhelmed with the job which can lead to poor performance and more medical errors. The welfare of the health professionals should be taken into consideration. This includes good salaries, good benefits, workshops and etc.

It is very important for health systems to meet the expectations of the people it serves.

According to Global Health Council, strong systems provide access to affordable, essential and quality services for all. The fees paid at health facilities especially government facilities should be made affordable to everyone. The disadvantaged and the elderly should be exempted in paying fees at health facilities.

Periodic training and refresher courses of health professionals should be put on budget to keep and maintain the standard of health care at a high level. This will prevent the negative assumption the public have about health professionals. Some people reject health care because of fear of being ill-treated by health workers.

## **How I will apply the knowledge to my community**

Public health systems are all levels of governmental and responsibility for ensuring healthy, social and physical environments, and consists of a variety of organizations that contribute to the core functions of public health to protect and promote health within the community (Jarvis et al 2020: 3). With this knowledge I have planned to improve the health status of my community. I will start by providing education about health and healthy living. This will include how to keep the environment clean and safe to prevent diseases and injuries and use of proper food hygiene, nutrition and healthy lifestyles.

My community is in the rural area. There is a lot of youth who are unemployed and they are always on the road aimlessly. This can contribute to crime and engaging in bad behaviours like use of drugs, alcohol and robbery to mention a few. There are also elderly people who



have none communicable diseases and needs to go to health facilities to refill their treatment and for periodical check-ups.

I will seek permission from the elders of the area to call summon a community meeting after I have explained my mission. The meeting will be held twice a year where health education and other health issues will be rendered starting from the youth to the elderly. I will ask the community to verbalise their concerns and challenges concerning health. Those challenges will be discussed with the community members. I will assist the community to choose rural health motivators who will be trained and to help the community with health issues as they will be always available in the community. This is supported by UNICEF (2016) that progress can be accelerated when communities are empowered to take action.

Apart from the challenges from the community, the following topics will be covered during the health education; food hygiene, environmental hygiene, proper sanitation healthy lifestyles importance of education, physical activity, crime prevention, treatment adherence, how to earn a living and many more topics that would arise as per the community need.

I will discuss with the community projects to develop in the community like farming, keeping livestock like cows for milk, chickens, pigs and many more. Other project like cooking classes, handcraft and many more will be incorporated in the projects. I will involve other stake holders like the policemen to teach the community about crime prevention, farmers to teach about good farming and how to keep livestocks, health professionals to educate about health issues.

I feel my community will benefit from these projects physically, emotionally, financially and health wise. The youth will be occupied with the jobs and also get money from the business. In this way the economic status of my community will improve. There will be money to buy food and to seek medical help if needed, food from the farm and livestock, making a crime free and healthy community.

At my work place mostly, I will provide health education to my patients and their families about healthy living and their illnesses, on how to take care of themselves at home to prevent complications. As a leader in my department I will try my best to create a good atmosphere environment so that my team work with motivation and provide good quality care.

## **My personal experiences**

I will talk about my experiences at my work place. I am working in a hospital and most patients delay seeking medical help. Those with Diabetes come to hospital with uncontrolled blood sugar, those with Hypertension come with extreme levels of blood pressure and complications like Kidney failure, CVA to mention a few. Those with Cancer comes at an advanced stage. On investigating and interviewing the patients and relatives I discovered that most of them defaulted treatment. This leads to treatment failure and drug resistance, which will eventually lead to increase morbidity and mortality.

When the clients were asked why they defaulted treatment and delay coming to hospital, different responses were obtained from the patients.

Transport issues- most patients reported unavailability of transport to take them to hospital. Those staying at the rural areas they suffer more. There is one bus which leaves in the early hours of morning and return at a specific time. If they miss that bus, there will be no other transport to use. If they were able to catch the bus, there are long que at the hospital which will delay the patients and cost some patients to sleep in the hospital overnight s the bus would have left them by the time they finish. So, some patients will decide not to seek medical help.

Financial issues- some patients reported financial constraints. Even if the transport is available they didn't have money to pay the transport fee and hospital fees. This also prevent some patients from accessing medical help especially the disadvantaged.

Unavailability of medications and supplies- Most patients end up losing interest of going to hospital when they do not get the medication from the hospital because it is not available.

When patient have to buy medication from private pharmacies it becomes a big challenge to most patients. Most patients cannot afford private pharmacies.

Ill-treatment- Some patients verbalises that health care professionals shout at them and talk badly about their illness, hence they opted not to go to the hospital. They reported that when they have missed an appointment the health care workers just shout at them though they are adult, instead of asking for the reason why they missed their appointments.

Upon hearing these challenges from the patients and relatives I decided to develop a project to address some of the challenges which were within my scope. I felt that the most

appropriate solution to solve these challenges is through education. Educating the patients and relative about the use of nearest health sites. This is supported by USC (2023) that some patients lack awareness about less costly care facilities, and need better education about where they can and should seek care, depending on their symptoms.

I liaised with the hospital senior management for assistance with this project to make it successful. My aim was to introduce the health education to all the departments in the hospital projecting to the community clinics where most patients with these challenges resides.

The senior management called a meeting with the junior management and I was one of them. My project was discussed and it was concluded that we should educate our patients and relatives to use the nearest clinics for minor ailments and for refilling medication, and go to the hospital for severe cases. The USC (2023) contend that patients need better education about where they can and should seek care depending on their symptoms. The author add that some patients lack knowledge about less costly care facilities. This can serve them time and money. Some patients would not need transport to go to the nearest clinics. They will seek medical care in time and honour appointments. This can prevent disease complications due to delayed or defaulting treatment, hence reduce morbidity, and the economic status of the country will be improved.

The ill-treatment challenge was solved by educating the health professionals on customer care. Through the assistance of the senior hospital management a private facilitator was hired to educate all health professionals on customer care. The Nursing Registrar was invited to remind the nurses about the Code of Conduct which includes the Nursing Ethics. The

sessions went well with the health care workers as they were reformed. In my department the health education is done weekly educating the patients and relatives till date. Other departments provide education daily because they see different people every day.

A patient satisfactory survey was developed and every patient who comes to the hospital is given the form to fill and drop it in the suggestion box. Less complaints about ill-treatment are reported by the customers and they are reducing daily.

The financial challenge and unavailability of drugs and patient's supplies in the hospital is beyond my capacity and scope. It is the senior management and the national authorities to work on these issues.

This project has made a great improvement in the attendance of the patients. Patients influx has been reduced in the hospital. Statistics shows that those from the communities now utilises the local clinics and comes to hospital for severe or complicated cases. This is evident by the reduction of disease complications which shows that now patients seek medical help early and honour they appointments. This project is continuing till date and evaluated quarterly.

## **Conclusion**

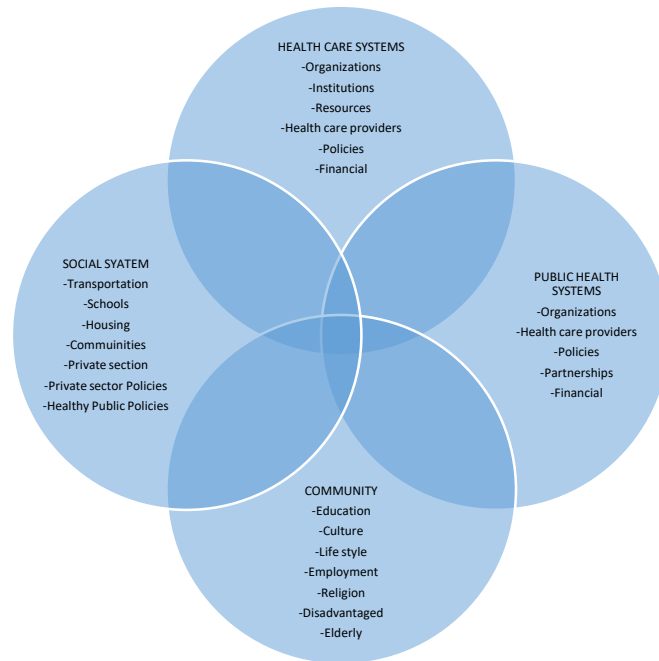
Public health works hand in hand with the health care industry. Public health aims to prevent people from getting sick or injured and focuses on the entire population. The health care industry treats people who are sick and focuses on individual patients.

The role of public health workers in a community is invaluable. They are the guardians of our health, working tirelessly to ensure that everyone regardless of their background has the opportunity to live a healthy life. Their impact is far-reaching, touching every aspect of community health. As we continue to face new health challenges the role of public health workers will only become more critical making their contribution indispensable in shaping a healthier and more equitable world (The Human Capital 2023).

Better health outcomes mean that patients can live longer, healthier lives. This is good for patients and their families, and the health care system. Good access to care can also help reduce costs as patients who have issues accessing care may wait until their condition becomes more severe before seeking treatment.

How the health system treats people's health needs, including how much protection it offers them from financial risk and responds to their expectations are important. People's needs should be promptly addressed to respect their time and reduce anxiety as well as for health outcomes.

Below is a summary of public health and health care systems illustrated in a diagram.



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