

Book Reviews

Teaching Health Statistics: Lesson and Seminar Outline, 2nd edn

S.K. LWANGA, CHO-YOOK TYE & O. AYENI (Eds)

World Health Organization, Geneva (1999)

230 pp., ISBN 92-4-154518-6, CHF 72 (CHF 50.40 in developing countries), US\$64.80

This unique book represents an interesting contribution to existing public health textbooks. Rather than the usual layout of an introductory textbook, this book is designed as a series of lecture notes for use by public health faculty. These lecture topics were developed at meetings and workshops by an international group of public health educators and are revised in this second edition. While the title refers to health statistics, the content of this book is much broader. The book is divided into three sections that encompass 23 outlines. Three annexes including supplementary data sets, statistical tables and random number tables round out this book.

The initial section of 10 outlines encompasses health sources, information systems and sampling, as well as organization and presentation of data, measures of central tendency and variability, probability, tests of statistical significance, and association, correlation, and regression. The second section comprises six lectures covering vital statistics including morbidity, mortality, and fertility measures, measures of disease impact and population dynamics. The third section includes five lectures ranging from medical records, death certificates, and ICD coding to survey and study design and use of computers. The text is completed with an open format discussion of ethics and a second open format discussion of a published study.

The text is intended for an international audience of public health educators. While originally designed for medical student education, this edition is broadened to include primary health care providers as an additional audience. The format is an outline of a subject area lecture. Many lectures include a one- to three-page student handout that can be copied. These handouts provide examples of problems or glossaries of terms. Examples provided in the lectures and handouts include an international range of cases. Rather than provide extensive materials on lecture subjects, a series of references is provided at the end of each lecture outline.

This book provides a very useful outline of statistics, epidemiology, and demographics for public health using a variety of real life international examples. This approach is broad and is intended to be used by a trained public health educator as part of an educational course on statistics and epidemiology. While not an exhaustive course outline of either statistics or epidemiology, the course outlines provide a very thorough introduction.

The limitations of this text are minor when its design is understood. The outlines are designed as lecture notes rather than complete sources of the material. Familiarity with the material and use of additional reference material is demanded. The outlines are designed for use by the instructors but are of less utility to students except as an outline of the lecture topics. While the handouts are useful, text refer-

ences and lecture notes are required. My hope is that future editions might include a separate student handbook that goes beyond the brief handouts provided, and incorporates some of the examples provided.

This textbook is an excellent guide for both undergraduate and introductory graduate courses in public health, epidemiology and biostatistics. The contribution of this book to the education of future professionals is novel. This book is a welcome addition to existing textbooks.

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Supporting Lifelong Learning, Volume 2: Organizing Learning

FIONA REEVE, MARION CARTWRIGHT & RICHARD EDWARDS (Eds)

Routledge Falmer, London & New York (2002)

218 pp., ISBN 0415259290, \$17.99 (soft cover)

This compilation of previously published articles represents a course textbook from the mother of open universities, the Open University in Great Britain. This is Volume 2, one of three Readers for the University's MA course: Supporting Lifelong Learning. The volumes set out to explore lifelong learning from the perspectives of teaching and learning, organizing learning and policy making. The claim is that "*They bring together for the first time theories from a diverse range of disciplines that are now central to our understanding of lifelong learning and provide a new and distinctive contribution to the field*".

The first two editors are a lecturer and a staff tutor at the Open University. The third editor is professor of education at a university in Scotland. But what are the credentials of the 20 authors whose articles have been assembled in edited form? A glance at the table of contents reveals that only one of the 11 chapters relates to the health professions. The titles tend to offer more than their scholarly, if less practical, discussions reveal: "Learning to work and working to learn"; "Skill formation: redirecting the research agenda"; "Envisioning new organizations for learning"; "Gender, work and workplace learning"; "Towards the learning organization? The impact of the manager on learning in the workplace"; "Knowledge creation in Japanese manufacturing companies in Italy: reflections upon organizational learning"; "Managing institutional change and the pressures for new approaches to teaching and learning"; "Professional education as a structural barrier to lifelong learning in the NHS"; "Communities of practice and social learning systems"; "The learning city in the learning society"; and "Learning for active citizenship: training for and learning from participation in area regeneration".

The chapter on "Managing institutional change and the pressures for new approaches to teaching and learning" is disappointing. It concentrates on the pressures of, and resistance to, change. There is no mention of the significant

changes that are occurring in health sciences education curricula and no mention of Problem-based Learning.

What then does the chapter on the National Health Service have to offer? In concordance with the majority of chapters, there is little of any international character. Beyond passing mention of Australia and the USA, the chapter concentrates on the nursing profession, with an overt feminist bias. There are just two references to inter-professional education and none in relation to medical and continuing education. This chapter appears to reflect the editors' view that relates lifelong learning to commercial competitiveness and to effective performance by the "workforce" in a changing environment. It would be difficult to find any in-depth discussion of the needs of sentient human beings for intellectual stimulation, for reinforcement of personal and professional self-confidence, for development of personal interests and for a more humane and imaginative approach to lifelong learning.

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The World Health Report 2001—Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope
 World Health Organization, Geneva (2001)
 178 pp., ISBN 924156201-3, US\$13.50, Sw fr 15. (Sw fr 10.50. in developing countries)

It is time, once again, for our annual search for HR (human resources) as a potential area of interest at the World Health Organization. As decided by the Director-General, the 2001 World Health Report (on mental health) was made available on October 4, five months after the 2001 World Health Assembly. The 178-page report devoted only one and a half pages to "developing human resources". This sign of benign neglect reminds me of the brief message stated last June in the WHO's General Programme of work 2002–2005: "Workforce management is a neglected area in many health systems and needs a more comprehensive approach". This statement seems to apply also to the WHO.

Thirty-five years ago, when I landed in the Brazzaville (PR Congo) WHO regional office for Africa, my attention was drawn to the very same neglected area. Mental health care (followed by dental care) was already the most neglected area. Now it is confirmed in the introductory "Message from the Director-General". In that message it is predicted that "within 20 years, depression will (be) the second cause of the *global* disease burden". But that message fails to mention even once the word education, or training, or human resources. These issues were to be found under "service provision" in a 30-page chapter where one finds the one and a half pages addressed to "developing human resources".

The authors focused most of their comments on developing countries in spite of the *global* threat predicted by the Director-General. Among the three proposed "scenarios for action" only the one which applies to "economically poorer countries" mentioned training of all personnel. The authors predicted that "the demand for generalists will increase and that for specialists will decrease". They recom-

mended investing time and energy in assessing *numbers* and *types* of professionals and workers required in the years to come. Considering the fact that experience has shown that such manpower needs assessments were almost always proven wrong, their more interesting recommendation was to redefine (explicitly) the roles (types) of many health providers. Even though the expression “definition” would perhaps be more accurate than “re-definition”, the intent is quite laudable.

The authors provided a listing of the professional competencies necessary dispersed in different chapters. The list suggested that professionals be able to: “identify (disorders)”, “screen”, “diagnose”, “treat and care for”, “rehabilitate”, “supervise”, “train”, “educate/involve the community”, “develop policies”, “link with other sectors”, “manage (a service)”, and (use) “research methods”. I was intrigued by the absence, in the short segment concerned with human resources, of “preventive care” among the above expected professional competencies. The word prevention was found in the message of the Director-General under the effectiveness of prevention of mental diseases, then again in reference to prevention of alcohol dependence and of suicide.

In summary, the annual report provides a very impressive description of a “Professional Profile” for mental health which would fit just as well with any other priority health problems.¹ As for the intriguing statement “research needs to examine the training requirements for mental health providers”, may I suggest that it could start by simply asking the following two questions of the deans of the 1682 medical schools: (1) does your curriculum include teaching activities organized to help students acquire the above professional competencies; and (2) do the examinations (counting towards award of diploma) measure, with validity, the students’ abilities in relation to each of the above competencies? It is hoped that someone responsible for HR in WHO/Geneva will analyse the replies and inform the world. Unfortunately it shall not be in 2002, as the selected theme is “Measuring, communicating and reducing risks to health”. Unless “communicating” implies HR. Let us continue to hope for the return of HR.

Note

1. An identical list has been published as early as 1977 in the first edition of the WHO educational handbook for health personnel. Offset series no 35. See 6th edn (2000, p. 139).

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