

A History of Public Health

ABSTRACT

Concepts of preventing infection, malnutrition, and sanitation have existed since ancient times. Ideals of “sanctity of human life” and “improve the world” in Mosaic Law, linked with Greek traditions of healthful nutrition and lifestyle, are relevant in modern public health. Roman sanitary engineering and military medicine made pivotal contributions. Hospital organization and university training for physicians developed during Islamic and Christian periods. The rise of cities, the Renaissance, and rapid changes in agriculture, trade, and industry all contributed to public health. New social, political, and economic reforms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, contributing to sanitation, social reform, and improved nutrition and medical care, led to improved longevity and quality of life in the twentieth century. Immunology, social security, health insurance, and health promotion expanded the scope and effectiveness of global health. Biomedical and social sciences, technology, and public health organization are critical as public health faces old and new health challenges.

SUPPORT MATERIAL

Student Competencies: Transferable Knowledge and Skills

The following are points of emphasis highlighting key principles that public health graduates are expected to understand and apply in practice. The key points arise from this chapter and other studies in specialized courses, seminars, readings during public health education, and continuing education. The selected skills and knowledge are divided into two parts. The first consists of core questions pertaining to immediate student requirements, while the second refers to competencies essential for successful public health practitioners. These include competencies recommended by the American Public Health Association in 2007, as well as those of the European Association of Schools of Public Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada’s 2008 Report on Core Competencies. For more detailed competencies please consult the Association of Schools of Public Health website at: <http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=851>

Part I: Core Questions

1. How did Jenner’s discovery of Vaccinia to prevent smallpox lead to total eradication of the disease?
2. How did James Lind’s discovery of the cure and prevention of scurvy lead to current issues with other micronutrient deficiency conditions?

3. How did Peter Panum’s work on measles support the germ theory?
4. List the 10 greatest public health achievements in the USA in the twentieth century. Describe their significance for the twenty-first century.
5. Describe the contributions of the following revolutionary public health leaders:
 - (a) Edwin Chadwick
 - (b) Lemuel Shattuck
 - (c) Robert Koch
 - (d) John Snow
 - (e) Florence Nightingale
 - (f) Louis Pasteur
 - (g) Otto von Bismarck.
6. How did the period of the Enlightenment influence advances in public health and medicine?
7. Explain how military medicine and the health of soldiers have contributed to modern-day public health and medicine (i.e., nutritional deficiencies, infectious disease, concept of triage, establishment of national health systems).

Part II: Knowledge and Skills

1. Understand the major historical events which shaped the field of public health as it exists today.
2. Recognize that major breakthroughs in public health were initially met with ridicule and opposition.
3. Understand the process of development of key scientific advances and their application in public health.
4. Appreciate the potential of individual contributions to advances in public health science and technology, and their application.

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