CONSIDERATIONS ON TRAINING IN PUBLIC HEALTH AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

INTERVIEW GUIDE with Professor Karolina LYUBOMIROVA

Prof. Karolina Lyubomirova, MD, PhD, MPH, ERT is a vice dean on international cooperation at the Faculty of Public Health, Medical University Sofia, Bulgaria. She is teaching public health, toxicology and occupational health at the department Occupational health. Board member of ASPHER since 2018. President of the Bulgarian Toxicology society at EUROTOX and IUTOX, Vice president of the Bulgarian academy of social sciences, Vice president of the Bulgarian academy of occupational health, National secretary of ICOH (2012-2018), National consultant in occupational health at the Bulgarian Ministry of Health, member of the Association health politics and management in Bulgaria. Chief editor of the Journal Occupational health and work ability, Member of the editorial board of Public Health Reviews, Member of the international editorial board of the Journal Archives on Public health; Head of the Editorial board of the Journal “Health Policy and Management”- edition of the Faculty of Public health, Medical University Sofia. National coordinator and participant in international projects: Leader of a EC funded project in EC Operative program: Human resources development, Priority Axis: Transnational cooperation in a collaboration with Milan University: EPPSIDTS – European Partnerships for Prevention and Social Innovations for Doctors by Training and Science (2017-2018); National coordinator of a international project, Public Health Program “EU Public Health Outcome Research and Indicator Collection – EUPHORIC”, “EUPHORIC”- 2003- OJ 2003/C62/04; International 5th Framework Project of EC “Quality of Life and Management of Living Resources”, “Effects of PAHs in environmental pollution on exogenous and endogenous DNA damage (EXPAH)”; Key action “Environment and Health”. Head researcher of a project, financed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education “Health Risk Assessment and opportunities for improvement the quality of life of the population living in the vicinity of refineries and petrochemical plants”(First award for scientific achievements MU-L-1000-1) . National coordinator of a EC project “Implementation of E-training in public health”, BG2012. Participation in EC financed project “Development of an integrated information system in Medical university Sofia BG051PO001-3-1.08-0036”.

Karolina LYUBOMIROVA: Public health is a vast area which requires the competency of different experts. That is why in order to respond to the expectations and needs of the societies PH experts should possess first of all basic (core) knowledge in PH and second- a specialization in a specific area (problem oriented). It is very important the PH training to be integrated in all levels of education – starting from high schools, through bachelor and master degree to PH thesis. At the moment in Bulgaria, but also in other countries, the PH training is underestimated. One of the reasons is the lack of clear definition about the competencies, activities and realization of the PH experts after their graduation. That is why the role of the National schools of public health or the leading academic structures (in Bulgaria there isn’t a National school of PH but our Faculty is the oldest and the largest university faculty ) is of a great importance to increase the susceptibility of the society and stakeholders to the PH problems. It can be achieved through wider announcement of the PH research data, evidenced based problems’ solutions, etc. The Faculty of public health at the Medical University Sofia provides all these activities either as participation of experts in health care and health management working groups at National and International institutions or by training of more than 2000 students in 4 bachelor and 10 master specialties.

R: Despite the wide acceptability of the role of education in PH, there is a large heterogeneity of Public Health (PH) education, and ASPHER is the European organization that brings together PH educational institutions creating a European working framework in this field. Activating in such a relevant organization raises great ambitions and your candidacy on board has been received and viewed with satisfaction by the members of the organization.

- Please specify for our readers some aspects and details about the main framework within ASPHER.
- What are the main benefits of activating as organisation in ASPHER? Please refer to benefits at national, respectively at European level.
- What motivated you to run for candidates, and what would be your expectations about ASPHER’s results in terms of health benefits for the population?

KL: ASPHER is the leading organization in EUROPE (and even beyond Europe as we already have already 11 members from USA, Africa and Asia) which develops different frameworks and networks in PH training . The aim is to help PH students and experts to achieve skills and knowledge about basic and global PH problems. There are several working groups which developed advanced programs on bachelor, master and PHD level. They try to use the expertise of the best teachers and practitioners in PH in order to help the students and experts to increase their preparedness for work in the PH and all the related areas.

Reporter: The responsibility of the public health sector is increasing and nowadays it has an essential role in many related fields. In this context, public health professionals must keep up with the new challenges and changes in health determinants.

-What are the responsibilities of the public health specialist and what abilities, knowledge and resources should he take to meet the new challenges?
- In your opinion, how important is education in public health at national and European level? What is the role of PH National School and how it is related with other health institution?
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There are many benefits of collaborating with ASPHER as we have a good cooperation with colleagues from different PH areas, exchange our experience and practices in training and research. It is very important to join our efforts in order to focus the attention of the societies on PH problems as it is of a crucial importance to solve the problems of the health systems. Such an example of the unification of ASPHER members is the creation of a group in 2017 which works on the establishment of a Public health law. This document is essential for the sustainable development and clarification of the PH values and implementation of common PH principles in all EU member states.

I was motivated to run a candidature for the board of ASPHER as I wanted to work more actively for the development of the existing and foundation of new ASPHER programs and projects which would benefit either the population in Bulgaria or in Europe.

I am glad that our faculty will host the Dean’s and Directors’ Retreat of ASPHER members in Sofia in 2020 for the first time in the 50 years’ history of the organisation. This event will give an opportunity to us to present the activities of the Faculty of Public health, Medical university Sofia as well as the other PH institutions in Bulgaria and to share our experience in teaching and reseach with the majority of the ASPHER members. We work on different international projects e.g. EU health literacy, EC funded project for European Partnerships for Prevention and Social Innovations for Doctors by Training and Science (together with the Milan university) and others and will be glad to exchange data and experience. We have developed training modules towards health managers, health experts and susceptible groups of the population to prevent socially-important and work related diseases in order to decrease their prevalence and rates (which are much higher than in the rest of the European countries).

R: Professor, you are an ambitious woman and always guided by solid principles, and your expectations can be the common expectations of most European citizens. In this regard, I would like to take advantage of your meeting with you and tell your vision of European collaboration within ASPHER.

- What do you consider to be the key aspects of PH education for improving the role of PH?
- What are your expectations for European public health cooperation?
- How do you see the ASPHER collaboration, in the short and medium term?

KL: The key aspects of PH education for improving the role of public health should be multidisciplinary training, problems’ and evidence based oriented, using all contemporary methods as blended learning, exchange of teachers and students, etc. I am convinced that the European public health cooperation within ASPHER is the only way to solve the local and global PH problems, to enhance the teaching programs and to arise the PH issues to the attention of the politics and stakeholders. The implementation of a common EU policy in public health and creation of a set of common activities is the key for solution of global health’s and social’s problems in the changing and globalized world.

R: Would you like to add anything else, maybe an answer to a question unaddressed in this interview? Thank you for your kindness to answer to questions.

KL: First, I would like to thank the editors of the Management in Health Journal for giving me the opportunity for this interview. I really enjoy sharing my views with the readers of this journal.

I wish them constancy in attempts to solve the specific public health problems which they meet and to accept a multidisciplinary approach in their public health practice. I hope that joining our efforts as PH experts, by sharing good practices and experience will result in improving the health and well being of our societies.

Interview conducted by Marius Ciutan