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Public Health: Professions and Possibilities

The postgraduate courses for health sciences and public health at German universities offer a job-oriented, multidisciplinary and practical education. Since the beginning of the 1990ies approximately 1000 graduates of the then nine courses of study have entered professional life. Asked whether the public health approaches they were taught have proven adequate for professional reality and whether they reached positions relevant to their training, most graduates confirmed. It can, however, not be doubted that graduates of public health courses benefit from their training in multiple ways.

Analyses carried out about the career of graduates have shown their successful integration in the labour market, job satisfaction and new professional perspectives in many national and international health and social institutions. Studies covering the whole wide spectrum of relevant professions revealed that graduates are readily and gladly accepted. The graduates, with original degrees in medicine, engineering or social sciences, work in research at universities or elsewhere, for health authorities, health insurance boards, medical associations as well as for out-patient, in-patient or rehabilitative care institutions, boards of independent welfare associations, community societies or initiatives, for national and international development cooperation and for the pharmaceuticals industry.

The new or extended areas of responsibility for public health graduates are usually linked to innovative tasks of health scientific relevance (e.g. quality assurance, evaluation). Moreover, modern fields of activity, such as evidence-based medicine, integrated care or disease management are gaining more and more attention on part of the employers.

Public health graduates confirmed that their course of study gained them important additional qualifications for innovative professional markets (such as

consulting) in the field of health sciences. However, the primary professional identity is still rooted in their first degree. They underscored the disciplinary and interdisciplinary broadening of their perspectives and the capacity-building for problem solving. Besides the typical social skills they underlined the methodical and managerial competences they obtained during their studies and which they can now directly apply. Due to their enlarged scope of activity they describe their professional role ever more often as "integration agents" or "change agents" in the field of health care.

Considering the need for innovation in the health care sector and in view of the discussions about costs and solidarity the people-oriented approach of the multidisciplinary field of public health is highly appreciated. This means that the possibilities and labour market prognoses for experts in public health are still promising.