Integrating journalism and public health to promote global health reporting training and education

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Public health and journalism: Stories of the human condition

Immense importance in convergence of public health and journalism

 mái If you look at many of the major health crises of our time, journalism, especially reporting, played a huge role in shaping both society’s perception of health as well as our response
 mái Storytelling through various mediums is important furthering public health aims to improve human well-being
 mái An image, a powerful op-ed, article, documentary of investigative journalism can effectively propel public health aims and put a human face on human suffering and joy

Photo credit: NPR

Photo credit: HRC

Photo credit: W. Eugene Smith
Finding common ground: global public health + journalism training

In public health, we train public health professionals where story telling is not a core “skill” but are key components of traditional public health areas:

- Health communications & promotion
- Qualitative studies
- Medical anthropology
- Social marketing
- Individual stories to put a face with a public health cause/goal
- Etc.

In journalism, we train communication & media professionals whose background is not traditionally public health:

- Timely sharing/translation of health information to diverse audiences
- Powerful images and story-telling – strong reach
- Role in shaping policy & public opinion about health

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Pitfalls between the silos?

Poor, thoughtless journalism can have a fatal effect during a public health crisis. On the other hand, powerful pieces can have amazing impacts on public perception of public health issues.

**Public health space**

Improve population health through research and evidence; on-the-ground interventions and programs.

- Build sustainable long-term capacity
- Less time, resources, skills to reach diverse audiences without crossover into media/communications space
- Sometimes - unappealing presentation/storytelling that do not promote a cause

**Journalism space**

Focus on disseminating information, investigating global health through diverse information sources and networks, often outside public health silos.

- Health stories have a human face and have drama, so relate to general audience
- But risk inaccurate or incomplete reporting of information. Not as research/evidence driven in the scientific sense (Pew 2009)

Are there potential opportunities we can address through global public health education?
Has public health education optimized the potential of developing young public health professionals who are interested in developing media + communications as a core competency?
How do we provide the right opportunities?

UC Berkeley: emphasize crossover of silos, develop professional competencies for public health (and journalism students) to report global public health

UC Berkeley SPH Center for Health Leadership Association brings together graduate student storytellers and their public health stories from across campus.

MJ/MPH joint program is a three-year program that allows students to combine their interests in public health, journalism, communications and media.

Trains students to understand the complexities of poverty in order to combat poverty worldwide.

kdmcBerkeley – media luminaries lead workshops & training programs for in the art of multimedia storytelling, video, photography, social media, data visualization, etc.
UC Berkeley Global Health Reporting Fellowship

- Launched in 2014
- Two $4,000 stipends awarded to UCB graduate students—one in journalism and the other in public health
- Cover expenses involved in producing a work of journalism that investigates an issue related to health disparities and/or health equity in a low-to-middle income country
- Work of journalism in medium(s) of the student’s choice: text-based (online, newspaper, magazine), radio, video, a series of blogs, or a photo-essay.
- Mentorship: a journalism faculty or a public health faculty co-advisor designated
Suffering to Joy: Family Planning in Burkina Faso – Erik Neumann
Use of mass media campaigns on the radio to reduce mortality in Burkina Faso

Can the Radio Save Lives?
In West Africa, new evidence shows that telling stories can encourage healthy habits.

Ibrahim Ouédraogo (in orange), aka Busanga, and other performers record a scripted drama about public health at a radio station in rural Burkina Faso. (Photo: Erik Neumann)

November 24, 2014  |  By Erik Neumann
Erik Neumann is a radio and print journalist in Oakland, California. In 2014 he reported from Burkina Faso as a Global Health Reporting Fellow at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism and School of Public Health.
» full bio
“…this fellowship offers a unique opportunity to do international reporting early in one’s career, to take lots of time and not worry too much about efficiency, and to push one’s own comfort levels while having supportive advisors to call on. This experience has given me the tools to do more international reporting in my career.”

- work with a translator/fixer
- selling stories from a far-off place
- Visas, language barriers, travel insurance, vaccinations, what to expect in terms of electricity issues in poor settings

“…public health researchers are more likely to share a common language with journalists, and therefore more likely to speak with them, than people in other scientific fields, such as chemistry or biology. In my own experience, public health researchers are less concerned that their work will be misrepresented by journalists.”
Displacement and Health in Southern Burundi: A collection of Photographs and Stories – Alex Goodell

Civil war 1972, 1993-2006

600k deaths, 2m displaced

Alex’s question: Are individuals returning from refugee camps (so called returnees) particularly at-risk? How can the clinic help them?
Village Health Works, Kigutu, Burundi
“About my health, I am suffering from a problem with my eyes. I am blind.... I was told by others that there is a whitish layer in them called cataracts. One eye was operated and now I can see some light. I was told to go back for the operation of the second but I have no means.... The first operation took BIF 75,000 [55 USD]. Even the money we used for the first operation was borrowed by my mother from a neighbor. The neighbor gave her the money and he asked her to go to work for him in his field until she finishes paying the whole amount.”

Janette Ndyauumziere
“Even if life is more difficult here than in Tanzania, I do not wish to go back there at all. I don’t regret at all! I cannot regret of being at home. You know to be called a slave or refugee in this case, it is not good, it hurts. Home is home even if it is dirty. Yes!”

Kereni Ciza
“I took more photographs in 2 months than I have in my entire life! As a student of both medicine and journalism...I felt there was a difficult balancing act between trying to gather individuals stories to share with the world, while also feeling some responsibility to them as a volunteer for the medical organizations on which they relied for care.

I interviewed a woman about her blindness and lack of ability to pay for surgery... a journalist, though moved, would not be expected to help that person find care. A medical student volunteer would play a very different role.

I've realized that perhaps my place in the journalism world is more on the side of opinion pieces and photography. I learned a lot about the history of Burundi...and the stories of many people who'd been displaced and had suffered immensely during these transitions.” – A. Goodell
Clear difference in what each student got out of the experience however…shouldn’t that be the case?

- Fellows are better prepared in careers to share important global health issues with the world
- Enriched public health and journalism experiential learning that provides opportunities not available in existing degree programs/coursework
- Provide opportunities for guidance and mentorship -- skill building – to develop their passions and careers
- Develop experience and skills
Turning public health professionals into journalists or vice versa is not the ultimate goal, per say. Instead, we need the silos to work together towards responsible/powerful global health reporting starting with training & mentorship. Through training we should:

- Recognize the students with a passion for impacting global health and telling stories
- *Strengthen their voices* through developing core competencies that merge both evidence-based public health and media/communications skills

We can reach them through:

- More internships and fellowships of global health reporting
- Formalized degree options emphasizing global health, especially at universities with both schools of PH and Journalism
- Transdisciplinary partnerships between departments, programs
- Funding given by global health organizations to Universities
Thank you

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