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HPJA Special Issue Editorial 1

Excellence in health promotion learning and teaching scholarship

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Health promotion academics play a crucial role in strengthening the health promotion workforce via scholarly approaches to training practitioners. This unique issue of the Health Promotion Journal of Australia (HPJA) is supported by the Australian Health Promotion Association (AHPA) and aims to build the evidence-base for learning and teaching in health promotion across Australasia. It showcases innovative pedagogical approaches that support students to develop their core health promotion competencies and professional standards; use of specialised learning resources and technologies; development of curricula and resources that reflect best practice health promotion; and assessment and evaluation processes that influence pedagogical developments in health promotion learning and teaching. We celebrate the contributions made by academics to health promotion learning and teaching and the important role they play in educating the next generation of health promotion practitioners who will join the efforts to address local, national, regional, and global public health challenges.

Our world is increasingly complex, and multiple interconnected drivers threaten the health and wellbeing of the human population and overall environment. To address these complex determinants, graduates of health promotion degrees require competencies that equip them to work collaboratively across sectors, to deliver co-benefits for people and the planet. Planetary health provides an ecological, systems thinking approach to guide curriculum development and build graduate capabilities to address the health and planetary challenges of the future. Capetola, Noy and Patrick's paper presents a model, The Sustainability Wheel of Fortune, which is embedded in an interdisciplinary undergraduate unit of study and postgraduate micro-credential unit, to help students develop the knowledge and skills to respond to challenges at a local and global level, and thus contribute to improving the overall health of people and the planet, now and into the future. Hickman, Johnson, and Lawler describe curricular choices and pedagogical strategies supporting student development of reflexive practice within a health promotion course at a large Australian University. The authors discuss how reflexivity in teaching and learning supports students in learning the role of health promotion in planetary health and developing skills in planetary health advocacy.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to create uncertain times for academics, students, and universities globally. Shelley and colleagues discuss the importance of shifting from siloed specialisations to interdisciplinary collaboration in public health education, and report on findings of a study that examined the use of systems thinking to design and deliver a Public Health in Pandemics subject. Students provided insights into their experiences and perceptions of subject design and delivery, and their ability to grasp the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary health promotion and public health practice. The authors highlight the need for training health promotion and public health practitioners to work across sectors and with diverse disciplines for current and future pandemic responses, consistent with previous scholarship published in the HPJA (1).

Advocacy is a core pillar of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (2) and the Shanghai Declaration (3), and an essential activity to achieve improvements in equity and overall population health. Building the skills of the health promotion and public health workforce to undertake effective advocacy will strengthen health programs, services and policies leading to improved health and societal outcomes. Bhatti et al. describe the scope of public health advocacy education within Australian public health degrees and reveal inconsistency in delivery. The findings highlight the need for Australian universities delivering health promotion and public health programs to review their curriculum and assess current strengths and gaps related to advocacy content with a view to ensuring all public health graduates are equipped with this essential skill. Curricula needs to be underpinned by a deep understanding of industry perspectives regarding advocacy skills required by new graduates entering the public health workforce and further research in this area is required.

O'Hara and Taylor's manuscript assesses the utility of the Red Lotus Critical Health Promotion Model (RLCHPM) as a competency-based pedagogical framework that can be applied in practice. The RLCHPM explicitly incorporates a set of critical values and principles across the phases of the health promotion cycle. Using an online survey with graduates of undergraduate and postgraduate health promotion degrees from 2008 to 2016 and supplemented with semi-structured interviews, findings demonstrated that most respondents were 'somewhat' or 'very' knowledgeable and confident about their ability to use the RLCHPM, and its values and principles. Similarly, most participants agreed that the health promotion values and principles in the RLCHPM are important, relevant, and useful to their practice. However, interview findings highlighted a tension between understanding values-based practice and how this could be constrained or inhibited by the realities of practice or the organisational context. The research suggests that the RLCHPM could be a core feature of university health promotion education to support graduates to apply critical health promotion in their practice.

On a similar theme, Hosseinzadeh et al.'s research focuses on developing critical thinking skills in health promotion. The authors' position is that health promotion students from some international contexts (such as the Middle East and Asia) find developing critical thinking skills challenging because culturally the education systems they come from privilege memorisation over independent thought. Case scenario-based teaching was employed to purposely develop more critical thinking skills – pre and post measures were taken to assess differences as a result of the initiative. The case studies improved critical thinking in a sample of international students, and grade attainment increased as a result of stronger critical engagement. While the study would benefit from further research to test the effectiveness of case scenario-based teaching in health promotion, it suggests a potentially promising avenue in supporting similar international cohorts.

Experiential learning and authentic assessment play an important role in developing students' health promotion skills, knowledge, and competence in preparation for the workforce. Chong et al. provide

an overview of how experiential learning can be embedded into undergraduate health promotion curricula via real-world project-based activities and assessments. Similarly, Anderson et al. describe how experiential learning and authentic assessments can be used to guide students' development of health promotion competencies in line with the IUHPE Core Competencies and Professional Standards for Health Promotion via sequential assessments. Leavy and colleagues report on the use of problem-based learning to develop critical thinking and self-directed learning. These pedagogical approaches, delivered either face-to-face or online, enable students to collaborate with their peers, apply health promotion theory to real-world issues, and reflect on their practice in a safe university environment. Students build critical academic and professional skills required for health promotion practice, which enhances their employability.

Health promotion training in Australia predominantly occurs within specialist tertiary degrees dedicated to the discipline and profession. Two articles in this special issue demonstrate how health promotion competencies can also be embedded into courses outside of the field to enhance the health promotion skills and capacity of other health professionals. Bracksley-O'Grady and colleagues discuss the need for a change in the ethos of academics involved in the development of dentistry curricula to ensure appropriate attention is given to health promotion theory, especially advocacy. The authors argue that this will enable future dental professionals to advocate for a range of oral health promotion activities such as water fluoridation, universal dental care, and sugar-sweetened beverage taxes. Allen and colleagues report on a signature pedagogical approach to develop health promotion competencies included in the Australian Dental Council professional competencies for new dentists. The signature pedagogy involves three key approaches - experiential learning, cooperative learning, and inquiry-based learning. These include experiential learning 'beyond the classroom' through a unique practicum, where students develop and deliver a primary school-based oral health promotion program. This innovation provides insight into best-practice approaches for developing the health promotion competence of dental graduates. These two articles provide examples of how health promotion competencies can be embedded into allied health and medical degrees to upskill other health professionals and reorient health services towards a health promotion approach (2).

This special issue provides an up-to-date pedagogical resource for health promotion academics both nationally and internationally. The collection of articles adds to the health promotion learning and teaching evidence base. It also provides a platform for collegial conversations and debate between health promotion educators about innovative pedagogical approaches to health promotion curricula to prepare future graduates with the competencies required for professional practice.

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