

# Essential Public Health: Theory and Practice\*

*Edited by Stephen Gillan, Jan Yates and Padmanabhan Badrinath*

\*1st edn. xiii +335 pp, paperback with illustrations and CD, ISBN 978-0-521-68983-0. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, RRP AUD97.00, 2007.

Public health has done more than any other discipline to address global health issues and improve the standard of living and life expectancy, especially during the past 100 years. Today, we are fine tuning public health in many developed countries and most health professional courses now include a substantial component of public health training. At the postgraduate level, there are more than 20 postgraduate public health programs in Australasia alone, including those offered through the Centre for Military and Veterans' Health.<sup>1</sup> It is important therefore that a concise textbook is available that addresses the contemporary issues in public health. A new textbook, *Essential Public Health: Theory and Practice* is an important addition to the suite of textbooks available in public health. Not to be confused with *Essential Public Health Medicine*, last published in 1993,<sup>2</sup> or the more recently published *Essentials of Public Health*,<sup>3</sup> *Essential Public Health* is ideally placed to be added to booklists of undergraduate and introductory postgraduate public health courses. It has a table of Contents, List of contributors, a Foreword by Professor John Danesh from the University of Cambridge, a second Foreword by Tony Jewell - Wales' Chief Health Officer, Acknowledgements, an Introduction, two main Parts, 17 Chapters, an epilogue, a Glossary and a comprehensive Index.

*Essential Public Health* is presented as an 18.5 x 24.5 x 1.5 cm paperback publication, which could easily fit in the briefcase or student's backpack. The textbook has a simple but attractive coloured cover. The back cover gives brief details of the book and of the editors. The stated primary aim of the textbook is "to capture both the art and science in the field". The stated target audience is "all those training in health care, social care and related disciplines such as environmental health". However, the book will appeal to all academic staff who co-ordinate and teach public health and related programmes, as well as students who are undertaking undergraduate courses in public health or introductory postgraduate public health courses. The textbook comes with a CD.

The two main Parts of *Essential Public Health* include "Part 1 The public health toolkit" and "Part 2 The challenges of public health in practice". The chapters in Part 1, written by the textbook's editors, include: 1. Demography; 2. Epidemiology; 3. Evidence-based health care; 4. Improving population health; 5. Screening; 6. Health needs assessment; 7. The health status of the population; 8. Health care evaluation; 9. Decision-making in health care; and 10. Health protection and communicable disease control. The chapters in Part 2, all written by external contributors, include 11. The health of children and young people; 12. Adult public health; 13. Public health and aging; 14. Tackling health inequalities; 15. Health policy; 16. Quality measurement and improvement in health care; and 17. International development and public health. The conclusion, entitled "Public Health - the future - be part of it", is written by David Pencheon. Each chapter has references, although no "further readings".

The two Parts of *Essential Public Health* are quite distinct. One recent review even suggested that *Essential Public Health* is really two books in one.<sup>4</sup> Part 1 systematically describes important "tools" and principles of public health, which are core to the discipline. There is good use of tables and illustrations in this Part. Primarily, the CD complements this Part of the textbook, which has a number of self-directed learning questions associated with it. Health promotion, although not a named chapter, is a major component of Chapter 4 Improving population health. Part 2 has well selected contributions from practitioners in the field, which are deemed "essential"; however there will be many topics missing. These chapters help to put the principles from Part 1 into practice. Much is made in the various chapters of "lobbying and working with key stakeholders...to resolve problems" (p495),<sup>5</sup> as pointed out in another recent review. However, there is no dedicated discussion concerning public health advocacy, community empowerment or how partnerships, consultations and negotiations with key stakeholders are developed, including the general public.

Each of the editors is from the United Kingdom (UK). Stephen Gillam is Director of Undergraduate Public Health Teaching at the Institute of Public Health, University of Cambridge. Jan Yates is a Public Health Specialist with experience of public health practice in Primary Care Trusts, as well as within acute hospital and mental health settings. Padmanabhan Badrinath is a Consultant in Public Health Medicine in the Suffolk Primary Care Trust. Of the 12 contributors, only one resides outside of the UK. It may be useful in future editions to have more contributors from other countries to further internationalise what is already a very useful textbook.

*Essential Public Health* is a useful introductory textbook in the field of public health and an ideal undergraduate teaching resource. It is a compact two-in-one textbook, which covers both the principles and the practice of public health. This first Edition of *Essential Public Health: Theory and Practice* is creditable effort and is sure to gain entry into the relatively competitive market of public health textbooks, especially with the University of Cambridge Press behind it.

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2. Donaldson, RJ, Donaldson LJ. *Essential Public Health Medicine*. London: Kluwer, 1993 (Reviewed BMJ 1994; 309: 280).
3. Turnock BJ. *Essentials of Public Health*. 1st edn. Boston: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2007
4. Lewis S. Book Review: *Essential Public Health: Theory and Practice*. J