
Western Cape Winter School

A Challenge for the Future

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Changes in the health sector

Current changes and needs in the health sector have led to the demand for additional skills and knowledge on the part of health personnel in a number of areas of public health. Some of the areas in which health personnel are being required to act are in the implementation of the primary health care approach, involving communities in the process of health development, assessing and prioritising health needs, managing health systems in a process of change, and planning and evaluating new health programmes. Such tasks require skills and knowledge in the important interdisciplinary area of public health.

People in the health sector as well as people in other sectors who wish to apply their skills to health and health development have expressed a demand for education and training in public health. Education and training in public health for all levels has been neglected as a result of the past orientation of the government in terms of health, health care, and health personnel education.

The Proposed Western Cape School of Public Health

The Western Cape School of Public Health (SOHP) aims to contribute to overcoming the government's negligence and to satisfying the urgent need in South Africa for appropriately trained health personnel who would form part of an infrastructure for a PHC, which is efficient and equitable, and meets the needs of those most in need. The school is a regional initiative, and is still in the process of pulling itself together in terms of joint management, curriculum and resources. However, progress is being made.

The Winter School

The Winter School, held from 29 June to 14 August, was the first teaching activity of the SOHP programme. The theme of the Winter School was "Managing Primary Health Care". The underlying purpose of the courses offered was to

provide participants with new insights into the primary health care approach, as part of the overall process of restructuring occurring at present in the health sector.

Initial ideas were developed by a Regional Winter School Committee which had representation from the five academic institutions in the region. These were; the University of Cape Town, University of Stellenbosch, University of the Western Cape, Peninsula Technikon and Cape Technikon. Administration of the programme was undertaken by the Committee to develop the SOPH, based at the University of Western Cape.

Courses Offered and Convenors

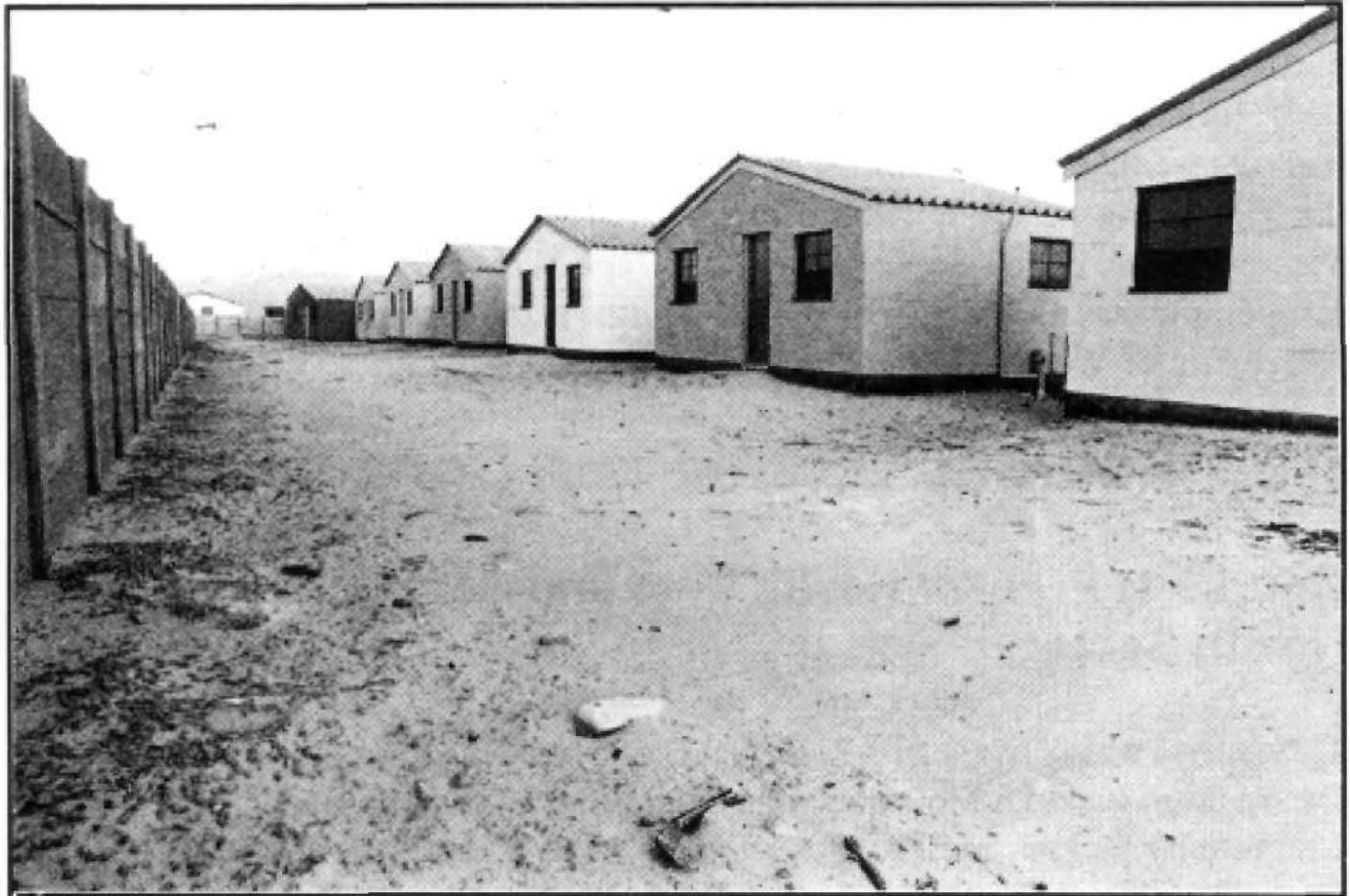
Course 1: Primary Health Care and Restructuring the Health Sector

This course was convened by Professor David Sanders of the University of Natal. Dr. William Pick, Di McIntyre and David Bourne from the UCT Department of Community Health, and Dr. Barron from the Western Cape Regional Services Council also participated in the presentation of the course. The objective of the course was to introduce participants to the key concepts, principals and debates around the PHC approach. Problems in the implementation of this approach were also discussed. There was a huge demand for this course, and only thirty participants could be accommodated. Participants were keen to gain more knowledge of PHC and how to implement PHC principles in their work situations. Participants visited Nolungile Clinic at Khayelithsha as part of their practical work.

Course 2: Training of PHC Programme Co-ordinators

This course was convened jointly by Professor Caroline Ntoane of the University of the Western Cape, Mantu Tshabalala of the National Progressive Primary Health Care Network (NPPHCN), and the African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF). The NPPHCN brought 25 of their co-ordinators from 8 regions in the country.

In total there were 40 participants from a variety of occupational backgrounds, ranging from community development workers to senior personnel in the health services. The purpose of the course was to enable health programme managers and co-ordinators to understand and apply the concepts of community based health care; to develop skills in designing and implementing training at community level; to learn skills in planning, managing and evaluating health programmes. The teaching methodology of AMREF was to involve participants



Khayelitsha. Photo: unknown

in producing their own manual as a text for Training of Facilitators for PHC. This course went on one field to Khayelitsha to "look and listen" - to observe the community.

When approached on what they liked most about this course, some participants made these remarks:

- the course has empowered me to go home and work within my community in implementing community based PHC;
- the course was inspiring;
- developed an understanding of how to develop community based programmes;
- before I came here I thought I was PHC orientated, but I have discovered that I am only starting;
- I liked the psycho-social method of teaching;
- I thought the course was revolutionary, emphasizing the social justice of PHC;
- I enjoyed the participatory learning process;
- I liked the spirit of the course;
- All our contributions were considered important and all contributed to compiling the book;

- I enjoyed sharing information and meeting people;
- The togetherness of the group;
- I gained a sense of empowerment for health for all.

Course 3: Health Systems Research for Evaluation and Management

The convenor of this course was the Medical Research Council, and was co-ordinated by Dr. Merrick Zwarenstein with Judy Katzenellenbogen and Hester van der Walt. The objective of the course was to provide participants with the methods with which to research and evaluate health systems, as part of the planning and management process. Participants were put to work on mini research projects at Nolungile Clinic in Khayelitsha, collecting data and determining how this data could improve training and management. Research results were received positively and acted upon by the clinic.

Course 4: Methodologies for Assessment of Food Security and Nutrition.

Dr Bill Bertrand and Dr Khan of the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, New Orleans, USA convened this course. It was hosted by Dr Bernade of the Medical Research Council Nutrition programme. This course was offered to 20 participants. The numbers participating were limited because there were too few computers.

The objective of the course was to improve applied analysis of food security (that is, people's access to food at all times) and nutrition issues for policy makers and programme managers. Participants gained skills in the area of food and nutrition surveillance using computers.

Many said that they found the course most useful having provided skills not available in South Africa. It was recommended that future collaboration should be explored with Tulane School in this area. The course produced two volumes of material and a model for a food and nutrition surveillance system in South Africa, which was submitted as a group effort to a national conference on food security in August 1992.

Course 5: Cultural Practices and Health Promotion

This was convened by Tops Guma and Jimmy Ellis of the University of the Western Cape. A lot of interest was expressed in this area, often overlooked in



Food security is a major problem in SA (see article on Drought and Poverty Relief). *Photo: unknown*

health personnel education. The objective of the course was to enable the participants to understand the implications of cultural and ethnic diversity for developing public health programmes and policies. Health and medical training in this country is primarily based on a western biomedical model. Consequently, many health personnel have little understanding of other cultural perceptions of health and disease and are often dismissive of such understandings. Thus this course was important for participants to overcome the inadequacies of their own training and understanding. Participants went on two fieldvisits to Noordhoek and Elsie's River.

Participants

One of the successes of the Winter School was the range of people from different regions, ages, colour, occupation and gender participating in the courses. The variation of participants broke down barriers and reinforced the idea that every health worker is important and has a crucial role to play. A hundred and thirty

people attended the various courses over seven weeks. Most of the participants were community development workers. The majority of whom were black with an even distribution of men and women.

The Challenge Ahead

Many of the participants felt that the Winter School had an important effect in inspiring them to meet the challenges ahead in the attempts to work towards a more equitable and community based health service. The Winter School showed the demand for short courses in the area of public health by different personnel working for change in the health sector. The school also showed the potential of such courses to mobilise and sharpen skills with a view to developing a health sector which is more equitable and relevant to the changing society in which we live. The challenge is to provide more and better education and training for all health sector personnel in the coming years in the relevant areas in order to facilitate the process of change and transformation currently underway. Change will not happen on its own or through instructions from above. It needs to be planned, implemented and evaluated. Most important, the right skills are needed for the job.

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