

Fachgruppe Global Health: neu lanciert



Dr. med. Nick Lorenz

Nick Lorenz, Präsident der Fachgruppe "Global Health" studierte und promovierte in Medizin an der Uni Basel. Seine Weiterbildung hat er in Public Health in London und in Business Administration in Basel absolviert. Zurzeit ist er stellvertretender Direktor des Schweizerischen Tropeninstituts und Leiter des Schweizerischen Zentrums für internationale Gesundheit.

Nick Lorenz, this August the Public Health Schweiz "Global Health" Special Interest Group has been re-launched. What do you understand by "Global Health"?

Some would argue that Global Health is just a new buzzword describing the basic fact that health is today no longer just a national (or cantonal if we think about Switzerland) issue, but now has a truly global dimension. With the evolution of global travelling this is obvious for infectious diseases, but today, there is more than that. Pharmaceutical research has a wide impact and problems related to funding health systems are not specific to Switzerland. Quality and equity of care are global issues. Last but not least, we have to recognise that health is a basic human right - and this is far from being achieved. Considering this broad definition, global health has to involve many disciplines and has to promote interdisciplinary collaboration.

What are the priority areas of Global Health?

Global Health is rather a way of thinking than setting specific priority areas. It does not focus on a specific health issue, although specific issues like cancer, flu or HIV/AIDS, or in more general terms, access to health care, are hot topics, particularly in view of the Millennium Development Goals. Global Health Diplomacy is also becoming an important aspect of Global Health.

Who are the active people in the newly launched special interest group?

At present it is a small group of public health professionals from Geneva, Lausanne and Basel, who have taken the lead. The members of the newly formed steering group, Bettina Borisch, John-Paul Vader, Michaela Told and I, bring in their personal experience, but are also linked to Swiss public health academia (Institutes of

Social and Preventive Medicine of the Universities of Geneva and Lausanne, The Graduate Institute of Geneva and the Swiss Tropical Institute in Basel). The first parallel session organized during the 2009 annual conference of Public Health Switzerland attracted more than 40 participants and some have already expressed interest in becoming active members of the Global Health Special Interest Group. For the future we expect to raise the interest and the active participation of many of the members of Public Health Schweiz.

What aims does the Global Health Special Interest Group pursue?

Think global and local - act both local and global. Right now, we would like to advocate global health issues in Switzerland. In practice we will use existing building blocks to:

- Maintain, and even extend, collaboration with sister public health organizations in Europe and worldwide. Apart from the existing links with the European Public Health Association, the newly opened office of the World Federation of Public Health Associations in Geneva hosted by the IMSP in Geneva (www.wfpha.ch) provides an excellent opportunity to strengthen the links between Swiss and global health issues.
- Contribute to joint international efforts addressing international and global health problems and facilitate contacts between Swiss and foreign institutions and organizations in the field of public health.
- Support institutions and organizations in the field of public health in Switzerland with an interest in embedding their work into organized international efforts more systematically.
- Provide members opportunities for international, professional contacts and collaboration.

In addition we intend to launch a discussion of what Global Health means in the Swiss context. On the more practical side, we will explore establishing a lecture series on Global Health issues in Swiss public health institutions, and of course, make this special interest group visible and attractive in future annual conferences on Public Health Schweiz.

In short, the Global Health Special Interest Group wants to enhance consciousness of the role

Europe has to play in Global Health, and become an active focal and reference point for Global Health issues in Switzerland.

Does the group collaborate at a national level with relevant organizations like the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) or the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)?

All members of the steering group already have partly long standing, and good contacts both with the FOPH in general, and in particular, it's Division of International Affairs. The same holds true for the SDC. The new director of the SDC has expressed some interest in reviving its health advisory group and the Global Health Special Interest Group might also follow up this idea by perhaps obtaining some financial support for its secretariat.

Why do you believe that Public Health Schweiz should deal with international topics and issues?

Switzerland is not a public health island. Apart from Global Health threats, I am convinced that we here in Switzerland can benefit a great deal from experiences made elsewhere. On the other hand, my colleagues and I also know that the international arena can take advantage of positive experiences we have made in Switzerland. The Swiss HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns have been widely acclaimed. Also in the area of improving migrants' health, Switzerland has undertaken efforts which are worthwhile sharing.

Nicolaus Lorenz, executive MBA, MPH, MD
Deputy Director Swiss Tropical Institute
Head of the Swiss Centre for International Health
Swiss Tropical Institute
Socinstrasse, 57, 4002 Basel
Tel. 061 2848125
nicolaus.lorenz@unibas.ch
www.scih.ch
www.sti.ch