Career Opportunities in GLOBAL HEALTH

Description of the field
Global health relates to health issues and concerns that transcend national borders, class, race, ethnicity and culture. The term stresses the commonality of health issues which require a collective (partnership-based) action. It is a research field at the intersection of medical and social science disciplines including demography, economics, epidemiology, political economy, and sociology. From different disciplinary perspectives, it focuses on determinants and distribution of health in international contexts.

Global health refers to health problems that transcend national borders — problems such as infectious and insect-borne diseases that can spread from one country to another. It also includes health problems that are of such magnitude that they have a global political and economic impact. It refers to health problems that are best addressed by cooperative actions and solutions — solutions that involve more than one country. Because global health problems can move across national borders, countries can learn from one another’s experiences, both in how diseases spread and in how they can be treated and controlled. Cooperation across countries is essential to addressing those health problems that transcend borders. This includes helping other countries address their particular health care crises.

Career Paths and Necessary Qualifications
Policy careers in global health are found where research, technology, government, and society intersect. Many positions require a degree in medicine, health, or nutrition, so it’s worth considering getting a degree in global or public health, or supplementing your related degree with some health-related coursework and practical experience. It is difficult to obtain ideal jobs in high-impact areas without at least five years of experience or more. Jobs in the areas in which one wants to focus, whether health-related or not, are a good place to start.

To gain an entry-level position, a candidate needs at least a graduate degree in a related field, a couple years of field experience, and a focus on a specific health-related topic, population, or region. A recent graduate will likely begin by backstopping a mission and supporting country programs. Other types of more advanced work might include running the mission activities of a small or large organization, providing technical expertise, managing programs, program development, or working towards the financial sustainability of a project.

DEMAND
+ The demand for qualified individuals is on the rise especially in impoverished countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.
+ New programs and initiatives are constantly being created through various organizations; whether it is to start vision testing or an HIV/AIDS prevention program, the international demand for public health professionals is ever-present and will not diminish
Program managers in global health are usually based in-country and oversee the day-to-day operations of a program, such as managing staff, hosting government relations, and tracking budgets and finances. S/he writes reports and may make technical decisions. A person interested in this work needs to have the following: experience managing people, resources, work plans and budgets to further a research and/or implementation agenda; skills in problem solving and management; experience living overseas; and competence in at least two languages.

Technical advisors help create programs by drafting proposals and developing program designs, visiting programs during implementation to track progress, monitoring and evaluating programs, and assisting in writing proposals. A technical advisor usually has the following: a medical or public health degree; specialization in a particular subject or practice, including implementation science, monitoring and evaluation, logistics and supply chains, or training and education; familiarity with a specific population or subject matter, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, reproductive and child health; and experience working across cultures.

Program developers and proposal managers write proposals and applications for funding, working from a design created by a technical expert and translating it into non-expert language. S/he needs to have enough knowledge of the subject to write about it, but doesn’t need expertise in the topic. To secure such a position, it is helpful to have the following: strong writing and communication skills to persuasively convey technical aspects to a mixed audience of experts and non-specialists; an understanding of the technical concepts of the project; grant writing and fundraising skills; and an ability to coordinate communications and manage business activities, including management, finance, and accounting.

Other types of work in global health include research positions at academic institutions, research organizations, think tanks, governmental agencies, and policy groups. Entry-level positions, such as research assistant, program assistant, or research analyst, often require specialization in a policy or a technical field.

Employment by Organization Type

- International, or Multilateral Organizations (e.g.: World Bank, WHO, UNICEF)

  Qualifications: A postgraduate degree in public health, business, economics, and social or behavioral sciences. Some have an employee nationality quota, which can make finding a position as a US citizen difficult due to overrepresentation. The salaries are higher and expect to travel quite a bit, but also to deal with the bureaucracy and inefficiencies of working at such a large organization. Contract work is a good way to get your foot in the door. These organizations offer fewer internship opportunities than others.

FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE PROFESSION

+ Much like the evolving nature of the viruses they confront, the future challenges in global health are difficult to predict. The ability to work on certain issues depends on funding trends and availability.

+ Overall, there has been a downward trend in funding for global health projects and initiatives. The recent financial crisis, debts, and deficits, makes sending money overseas easy to criticize.

+ The HIV crisis has been a huge challenge that has been going on for a number of years and as it transitions to a chronic issue, rather than an emergency, much of the HIV landscape will start to dismantle and funding will become an issue.

+ There is an upward trend in sending funding directly to countries in need rather than through outside agencies, which are seeing less support for their work. However, there will always be a need for outside agencies due to the periodic mismanagement of funds by less stable countries.

+ HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention, and control are on the top of everyone’s lists along with tuberculosis, malaria prevention, and cancer research. Destitution and malnutrition are also chronic challenges in the areas where these fields are most needed.

+ The integration of various types of health programs is gaining
Bilateral Governmental Organizations (e.g.: CDC, USAID, DHHS, embassies)

Qualifications: a postgraduate degree in public health, business, economics, and social or behavioral sciences is helpful. These organizations offer more internships and entry-level positions. USAID tends to contract with other agencies rather than hire people directly due to structural constraints on hiring.

Academic Institutions
Offers job security, teaching, and research experience. Opportunities depend on funding.

Nonprofit Organizations
There are two categories: 1) Specialized service providers filling specific medical needs. The American Academy of Family Physicians and the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene compile lists of international positions. 2) Emergency relief and rehabilitation (MSF or ICRC, for example) to assist with humanitarian disasters. For both categories, permanent positions are mostly for those working on policy and operations. Medical staff are often hired on a short-term/as-needed basis.

For-Profit and Nonprofit Consultant Organizations (e.g.: John Snow Inc., FHI360)
These organizations have been growing rapidly as governments have been using more contractors to provide both expertise and manpower. They offer generally well-paid, full-time positions to work on long- or short-term assignments, and include travel.

Faith-Based Organizations (e.g.: Church World Service, WVI)
For many, they expect their staff to be member of the faith, with the exception of short-term contractors. Pay is often lower and most initiatives center on relief or clinical work.

Sample Employers

- Africare – africare.org
- American Red Cross International – redcross.org
- American Refugee Committee – arcrelief.org
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – gatesfoundation.org
- Bread for the World – bread.org
- CARE – care.org
- Christian Relief Fund – christianrelieffund.org
- Concern Worldwide US – concernusa.org
- Doctors Without Borders – doctorswithoutborders.org
- Global Health Council – globalhealth.org
- Mercy Corps – mercycorps.org
- Partners in Health – pih.org
- PLAN International – planusa.org
- Project HOPE – projecthope.org

FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE PROFESSION (Cont’d.)

popularity, such as USAID’s Family Planning/HIV Integration program.

+ There is a need to promote, maintain, and improve individual and community health by assisting those populations in adopting healthy behaviors.

+ Public health professionals must collect and analyze data to identify community needs prior to planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating programs designed to encourage healthy lifestyles, policies, and environments. This research may serve as a resource for other individuals, professionals, or the community, and may administer fiscal resources for health education programs.
Resources for Additional Information

Associations
- American Public Health Association – apha.org
- American Society for Nutrition – nutrition.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – cdc.gov/globalhealth/index.html
- Foreign Policy Association – fpa.org

Internet Resources
- International Nutrition Foundation – inffoundation.org
- Center for Global Development, Global Health Policy – cgdev.org/page/global-health-policy
- Center for Global Health Policy – idsaglobalhealth.org
- Center for Strategic & International Studies – csis.org/program/global-health-policy-center
- Duke Global Health Institute – globalhealth.duke.edu/about
- Families USA – familiesusa.org/issues/global-health/matters

LinkedIn
- Global Public Health – linkedin.com/groups/Global-Public-Health-120372

Publications