
Public Health Evolution: Analytical Essay

When we think of public health we often think only of food and water safety. Public health is so much more. Public health can be defined as “protecting and improving the health of people and their communities” (CDCFoundation, N.D., paragraph 1). It serves populations in many ways, such as disease awareness and control, research to limit health disparities and education regarding many health topics (Bryant & Rhodes, 2019). Though much work remains to be done in the ever-changing public health, it has evolved greatly over the years. Examples of this growth include better communicable disease control, quarantine and hygiene practices, tobacco use has declined and opioid and prescription drug abuse is declining in the teenage population.

One way public health has evolved is in the area of tobacco use. Cigarette smoking used to be widely used in advertisements, television shows and movies; it was characterized as something healthy and socially acceptable to do. In 1960s, the surgeon general realized that this was not the case and in fact was quite the opposite (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). They began putting warnings on cigarette packs to try to deter people from smoking. Age restrictions were put in place to avoid selling to those that are believed are young and impressionable. It was learned that second hand smoke was just as dangerous as smoking the cigarette. Smoking bans in public places were put in place to attempt to combat that. Tobacco taxes were raised in efforts to curb smoking. All of these things have decreased the number of smokers, though the results are slow (Frieden, 2015).

Substance abuse, especially opioids and prescription drugs, has been a long-standing issue. It affects not only the individual using it but their families and those that are around them. Opioid use has been attributed to an increase in violence and domestic abuse, vehicular accidents, and chronic disease such as Hepatitis, even death (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). With the introduction of drug and alcohol prevention classes in public schools, outreach of public health officials, new drug prescribing guidelines for physicians and the induction of drug treatment centers, these statistics are beginning to decline. The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) has developed curricula to be taught to elementary aged children in hopes that early intervention will curb drug usage. This has been effective, as evidenced by the statistics of teenage children that have tried drugs in the last year showing at least a slight decrease (Cicero, Ellis, & Kasper, 2020).

Finally, and perhaps the most important example of how public health has evolved over the years is the development of methods to control communicable disease. The Spanish flu was one of the deadliest pandemics of our time. They did not have the knowledge of quarantines, flu vaccines or even that the disease was spread by air droplets and that living in close quarters was making the problem worse. People of that time believed that the poor chose to be that way and that if they got sick, it was essentially their own fault for not trying harder (Spinney, 2017). We now know that what the people of that time thought to be true, simply was not. We know that proper hygiene is necessary to prevent and combat illnesses; we know that people living in close quarters are likely to all become infected. We have a number of vaccines that have eradicated multiple diseases such as smallpox, diphtheria and pertussis. Certain illnesses, known as reportable illnesses, are reported to public health officials who then track the number of the population with the illness because they are known as communicable or highly

contagious diseases and allows public health officials to respond appropriately.

Indeed, while much work remains to be done in public health it has evolved greatly already. Communicable diseases can be contained, the opioid crisis is slowly declining and cigarette smoking may soon be a thing of the past. We must continue our research efforts and education of the public so that we all may remain at our optimal level of health for many years to come.

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