

EUPHA SECTION ON PUBLIC HEALTH EPIDEMIOLOGY

Notes of the meeting of the Section, held on 11th November 2005 (supplemented with further information from the Executive Council meeting held on 12th November 2005)

Present:

David Boniface (UK), Tine Curtis (Denmark), Carolyn Davies (UK), Antoon De Schryver (Belgium), Elisabetta De Vito (Italy), Ruth Dundas (UK), Fabrizio Faggiano (Italy), Lesle Fairley (UK), Maria Feychting (Sweden), Lindsay Gray (UK), Jan Holcik (Czech Republic), Edwige Haelterman (Belgium), Johan Hallqvist (Sweden), Annemien Haveman (The Netherlands), Goran Henriksson (Sweden), Verica Ilic (Serbia & Montenegro), Christoph Junker (Switzerland), Farhad Ali Khan (Sweden), Irena Klaus (Slovenia), Ilona Koupil (Sweden), Giuseppe La Torre (Italy), Rickard Laung (Sweden), Ljiljana Lazarevska (Macedonia), Alastair Leyland (Scotland), Heidi Lyshol (Norway), Gabriele Messina (Siena), Lamberto Manzoli (Italy), Serena McCluskey (UK), Maria Pavia (Italy), Simone Chiadò Piat (Italy), Colin Pritchard (UK), Cecilia Quercioli (Italy), Naser Ramadani (Kosovo), Neil Riley (UK), Carlo Signorelli (Italy), Roberta Siliquini (Italy), Federica Vigna Taglianti (Italy), Paolo Villari (Italy), Robert West (UK), Erika Wichro (Austria), John Wilkinson (UK) and about 20 participants whose name was not on the participant list.

Background information:

At the Oslo Conference in October 2004 some important decisions were made concerning the EUPHA section on Public Health Epidemiology. Prof. Gunnar Tellnes, EUPHA President, and Prof. Horst Noak, EUPHA President-elect, both agreed on the fact the EUPHA Section on Public Health Epidemiology needs to be strengthened, after the wonderful work of Prof. Klim McPherson, EUPHA past-President.

Prof. Klim McPherson was the President of the EUPHA Section on Public Health Epidemiology for many years. He organised two workshops at the 2001 Brussels Conference, "Life course epidemiology and health inequalities" and "Towards modern public health – the relevance of social capital". Before the Oslo Conference Prof. Klim McPherson communicated his intention to leave the Presidency of the Section. Klim McPherson is an extraordinary figure in Public Health and surely the "ideal" President of a section on epidemiology. It will be difficult to conceive the EUPHA Section on Public Health Epidemiology without his continued support as President.

As to matters of organisation, Dineke Zeegers pointed out that the Section requires some people that dedicate some time to share information with past and new potential members and to begin to plan a workshop for the EUPHA Conference in Graz. Prof. Gunnar Tellnes asked Giuseppe La Torre (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Rome), Alastair H. Leyland (University of Glasgow) and Paolo Villari (University "La Sapienza", Rome) to take up this work.

A “census” letter was sent to people potentially interested in the Section, together with a basic information form to adhere to the Section. The response rate to this letter was encouraging, with 37 replies from 14 countries. An updated call for interest was put on the EUPHA website. In mid-2005 the new EUPHA database was available and according to this the Section, with 675 members, is one of the biggest of EUPHA. The United Kingdom is the most represented country with 126 members, followed by The Netherlands (53) and Italy (52). A further 20 countries are represented in the Section with 5 members or more.

Many interesting ideas for workshops were formulated, such as new methods for epidemiology in public health, higher education for epidemiology in Europe, mortality patterns in Europe, strategies to identify health policy needs, psychiatric epidemiology, genetic epidemiology, health and ethnicity, epidemiology of inequalities, lifecourse epidemiology in Europe, epidemiological methods for health impact assessment, etc. Systematic reviews and meta-analysis are emerging methods in epidemiology and public health and, after some discussion, it was decided to organize a workshop on this topic. The workshop proposal “Systematic reviews and meta-analysis in public health” was enthusiastically accepted by the EUPHA Scientific Meeting (It ranked 4th among many workshop proposals).

Current workshop in Graz:

The workshop “Systematic reviews and meta-analysis in public health” was held on Friday, 11 November from 14:00 to 15:30 and included four presentations. John PA Ioannidis (Greece) introduced the topic outlining the importance of meta-analysis in public health, as well as its limitations. Some important issues were addressed, such as the comparative evaluation of randomized vs. observational evidence, the results of large trials compared to those of small trials, the influence of study quality on the results, and the evaluation of safety of health interventions. Some final remarks were made on the challenges for meta-analysis in the molecular medicine era. Fabrizio Faggiano and Federica Vigna Taglianti (Italy) talked about the importance of observational studies for evaluation of the efficacy of preventive programs and the associations of public health interest, outlining the main problems in pooling these data. The last two presentations had more practical implications. Maria Pavia and Italo Angelillo talked about some meta-analyses of published studies that they had conducted in the past about the effects of certain environmental exposures on human health (radon, residential electromagnetic fields). The landmark meta-analysis of Anders Alhjem and Maria Feychting on the association between electromagnetic field and childhood leukemia offered the opportunity to hear from Maria Feychting regarding the strengths and limitations of meta-analysis of individual patient data.

The workshop was regarded as a success and attracted more than 100 participants. However, the time for discussion was too short, and some section members would like to have longer workshops or workshops with more time for discussion and interactions.

Roles and functions of the Section:

The meeting discussed possible roles and functions of the Section. Epidemiology is everywhere in public health and it is difficult to define a “specific” mission for the

Section. Some argued that it should concentrate on methods of public health, others believed that it should function as a “bridge” between public health and other disciplines, others suggested that it should concentrate on topics not covered by other EUPHA sections. All participants agreed that the section should provide a platform for the exchange of information, experience and research in the field of public health epidemiology and encourage and promote European joint and multicentric research activities. The main roles and functions of the EUPHA Section on Public Health Epidemiology include the following:

1. to update epidemiologic methods in public health;
2. to offer training courses on epidemiologic methods (perhaps linked to EUPHA Conferences in the future);
3. to develop and disseminate methods for teaching epidemiology;
4. to bridge the gap between epidemiology and other disciplines of public health;
5. to address topics not covered by other sections, and to work together where overlap occurs;
6. to provide a platform for exchange of information in the field of epidemiology;
7. to improve communication between member countries, particularly those in transition;
8. to build a bridge between research, policy and practice;
9. to apply for EU projects.

Workshop for the EUPHA Conference in Montreaux:

According to the new EUPHA sections rules, all EUPHA sections must organize an official workshop during the EUPHA Conferences. Alastair Leyland proposed two workshops, “Contextual and compositional determinants of inequalities” and “Life course epidemiology”. Another workshop was proposed by Chris Todd, “Falls amongst elderly people: lessons from 4 years of the Prevention of Falls Network Europe (ProFaNE)”. After some discussion, the meeting decided that the workshop “Contextual and compositional determinants of inequalities” should be the “official” workshop of the section at the next Montreaux Conference. Alastair Leyland will take up the organization of the workshop.

Other workshop proposals are strongly welcome. As a matter of fact, it is possible to organize more than one workshop. People interested into the organization of a specific workshop may contact Paolo Villari (paolo.villari@uniroma1.it), Alastair Leyland (a.leyland@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk) or Giuseppe La Torre (giuseppe.latorre@rm.unicatt.it).

Working groups:

The meeting identified working groups as the main tool of the Section. It was decided to put a call for interest for the different working groups on the EUPHA website together with the e-mail address of the contact persons. After some discussion the following working groups were approved:

1. Guidelines of public health practice (Contact person: Fabrizio Faggiano, fabrizio.faggiano@med.unipmn.it);
2. Training and education for public health epidemiology in Europe (Contact person: Giuseppe La Torre, giuseppe.latorre@rm.unicatt.it);

3. Contextual and compositional determinants of inequalities (Contact person: Alastair Leyland, a.leyland@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk)
4. Systematic reviews and meta-analysis in public health (Contact person: Paolo Villari, paolo.villari@uniroma1.it).
5. Health Observatories (Contact person: John Wilkinson (john.wilkinson@nepho.ork.uk))

Other proposals of working groups are welcome. People willing to create specific working groups were invited to contact Paolo Villari (paolo.villari@uniroma1.it), Alastair Leyland (a.leyland@msoc.mrc.gla.ac.uk) or Giuseppe La Torre (giuseppe.latorre@rm.unicatt.it).

Practical issues:

During the meeting the importance of the new EUPHA database was emphasized as a means of sharing information in the field of epidemiology in public health. People interested in exchanging or circulating relevant information are invited to send e-mails to Paolo Villari (paolo.villari@uniroma1.it) and the e-mails will be promptly forwarded to all section members.

Other topics:

Paolo Villari, on behalf of Alastair Leyland and Giuseppe La Torre, met Prof. Horst Noak (EUPHA President) and the Executive Council with other section presidents on Saturday, following the end of the Conference. It was proposed that the EUPHA Section on Public Health Epidemiology could have a coordinating group constituted by three members (Paolo Villari, Alastair Leyland and Giuseppe La Torre) instead of a unique president. This proposal was accepted on a substantial basis, but, from a formal point of view, EUPHA sections rules requires one president and two vice-presidents. Paolo Villari will held the presidency until the next EUPHA Conference, followed by Alastair Leyland until the 2007 Conference and Giuseppe La Torre until the 2008 Conference.

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