

PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY AND PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH IN UKRAINE: LINKED, INTERLINKED OR UNLINKED?

The paper explores the presence of connection between public health policy and public health research in Ukraine. Particularly, the authors' attention is paid to; the grounds for developing public health policy in Ukraine; priorities and main areas of public health research; the structure of public health research; input of international projects into public health research (such as Project CINDI, the International Renaissance Foundation, the World Bank, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, USAID, European Union). The perspective trends for developing connection between public health policy and public health research are outlined.

Introduction

The collection of data related to health of population and functioning of the public health system is viewed as the starting point for developing a public health policy. So, the backbone of the effective public health strategy is research and reliable health information systems upon which the rational action can be based [1]. Moreover, political decisions and their implementations, as well as impacts on the health status of population should be thoughtfully evaluated. Since public health policy not only influences but is also affected by all sectors of society; that which include housing, the environment, the workplace, recreational facilities, tobacco and alcohol policies and education. Ideally, the public health priorities are based on knowledge of the occurrence, socio-economic consequences and preventability of health problems, taking into account prediction of future trends and expected costs and benefits of public health measures [2].

Actually, any theory on public policy process (rational, incremental, systemic and so on) [3, 4], maybe with exception of the 'theory of chaos' and 'garbage can theory', appraises the role of the research-based evidence as important factor of the feasible and coherent policy. For example, from rational perspective the policy-maker must present a structural analysis of a problem, define goals, set priorities, identify instruments to use in achieving goals (that is to solve the problem) and then select the best approach. Evidently, this rather technically oriented problem-solving approach has always played a prominent role in health policies which traditionally considered the domain of the medical profession [5].

As for middle- and low-income countries with lack of real democracy, the policymaking process

is highly centralised there; policies neglect the community opinion and rely on the interests of the certain groups and not on the results of the research. The situation in health care and health policy in Ukraine was a subject of different policy and research documents, including done for the World Health Organisation (WHO) [6, 7, 8]. But the matter of conducting public health research and especially usage of research data is not widely discussed in the Ukrainian scientific circles.

This paper is aimed at reviewing the goals of the Ukrainian public health policy and the role of research in the sphere of above mentioned policy. It includes a description of the current issues in public health in Ukraine, organisation of public health research, history of international collaborations in this sphere.

Public Health Policy in Ukraine: Stepddaughter or Challenge?

In Soviet time, many efforts were spent on disease prevention and hygiene. However, the modern concept public health is rather new to Ukraine. If we regard public health as organised activities of society aimed at preservation, improvement and rehabilitation of health of population and based on taking into account biological, social, economic and cultural factors of influence [9], than this is a challenging matter for the Ukrainian health policy. Since it was and still is predominantly medically (treatment) oriented, devoted to the development (in past) and surviving (in present) of medical care services. Nevertheless, on the formal policy level a lot of attention is paid to the issues of public health. And these declarations are reflected in the numerous legal acts that regulate the sphere of health protection in Ukraine, its structure and functions.

While specifying long-term objectives and priorities in the sphere of public health in Ukraine it is possible to single out the following things out of the Concept of Health Development in Ukraine: first and foremost, the professionals in the sphere of public health need to focus their activities to: 1) facilitate disease prevention, 2) bring down risks to people's health that are related to environmental pollution, harmful habits and unhealthy life-style [10].

It is even possible to speak about the change in the tendency of the overall sphere development: health care today in general, and public health in particular only react to consequences of the problems that emerge at certain stages of social development. Such reactions are often coming much too late timeless thus making the whole health care sphere inadequate to current needs of population. In future there is a task of making this sphere a fully pro-active one, that it, envisage preventing of negative factors that emerge to harm people's health.

When setting up long-term objectives and tasks for the public health sphere it should be borne in mind that Ukraine lags behind the world tendencies of the development in this sphere. Still burning are the issues of overcoming the burden of communicable diseases, when currently world-wide it is the non-communicable diseases that get paramount attention - simply because fighting communicable diseases has already been successfully completed. It is therefore possible to conclude that public health principles should serve as a long-term objective for developing public health sphere in Ukraine, which includes, in particular, pro-active approaches to people's health and creation of healthy life-style conditions for all the members of this society.

Specification of short-term tasks and objectives, as well as priorities of public health in Ukraine, result from the urgent needs of society that demand certain actions to prevent general deterioration of the situation. There are no doubt as to priorities that need attention of research and new strategies development - all aimed at public health sphere. This is, primarily, fighting HIV/AIDS epidemic, preventing the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, supporting anti-tobacco and anti-drugs campaigns, examining the state of affairs in reproductive health of population, possibilities to reform the health care system basing it upon the principles of public health. The government currently is unable to solve them through lack of necessary resources, especially human and technical ones. Moreover, solving these problems is particularly important for the whole world community, and they get more importance for Ukraine striving to join the European Union.

Ukraine does not have a specific document explicitly detailing state policies for implementation of the public health policy or at least WHO strategy of health for all; there is nonetheless strong government support for this policy although this support has as yet not been translated into any financial resources towards implementation [11]. Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Ukraine proclaimed numerous reforms in health sphere. However, despite these efforts the system has generally retained the main features of the Soviet model of health care. So, as for today the priority development of health care in Ukraine goes along medical-treating line, while preventive direction is often well outside immediate attention of the public administration and representatives of medical institutions.

Priorities and Structure of Public Health Research

The national policy on science and research is as rather challenging topic to Ukraine as public health policy. Despite the extensive political discourse on the matter of science development many academic institutions are underfinanced or not financed from the state budget at all. Only those who can get grants or order from commercial or international organisations can perform real research.

The priorities of the current national policy on science and research are reflected in the list of the state research programs that include research on human development in Ukraine, including poverty elimination, policy of self-government and human rights, environmental research, treatment of the most common diseases, biotechnologies, information technologies, technological industrial research and so on [12]. Public health research does not actually belong to those strategic priorities, although some components of the certain state program are indirectly connected with the health status of population.

During last two-three years, different state research institutes (supported by the government) have conducted a number of long-term programmes in such areas as:

- monitoring of the health status of population;
- sanitary-epidemiological supervision over development of non-infectious diseases in Ukraine;
- impact of Chornobyl accident on the population health;
- children's health and prevention programs;
- needs of the elderly population in the medical care;
- standards and norms in medical care;
- population and social development forecast.

Since 1993, Ukraine has been monitoring the implementation of its objectives and health for all principles formed the basis for the Principles of Legislation on Health Care, the Concept of the Development of Health Care in Ukraine, and other laws, resolutions and national programmes designed to improve population health.

Within several recent years due to facilitator efforts of international partners Ukraine has joined a number of important projects on the following topics:

- prevention of HIV/AIDS spreading in Ukraine, as well as assisting progressive methods introduction of supportive care to treat such conditions;
- studying tobacco-smoking effects upon people's health;
- studying developmental pattern of non-infectious diseases in Ukraine, as well as possibilities to support health, including reproductive health and birth-defect surveillance;
- analysis of public health sphere management in Ukraine.

Definitely this is not the all-embracing list of all research conducted in recent years in public health sphere in Ukraine, but still it highlights major directions and priority spheres of today's research and projects aimed at solving these problems.

Not all these research have the direct link (or any visual link) with the public health policy. However, it is supposed that all state public health programmes are based on the relevant research data. E.g. Program on Health of the Elderly People was based on the survey of the elderly population needs in medical and social care conducted by the Institute of Gerontology of Academy of Science.

The various researches regarding HIV/AIDS spread in Ukraine are used by the international and Ukrainian organisations working in the sphere of prevention and care management.

The recent initiative of the President Viktor Yushchenko supported by the Ukrainian Parliament on prohibition of smoking in public places and tobacco production and import control is believed to be inspired not only by the similar policy in EU countries, but by the results of the study on tobacco-smoking effects upon people's health and lobbying efforts of the scientists, medical doctors, NGOs.

The peculiarity of the Ukrainian public health system is also in parallel functioning of the two types of the health research institutes: 1) those subordinate to the Academy of Medical Science (directly financed from the State Budget and supervised by the Cabinet of Ministry) and 2) those subordinate to the Ministry of Health Care, inclu-

ding the Institute of Public Health supposed to be the leading institution in the area of social medicine and public health. This chain of scientific-research regional and all-national institutions must perform research in this sphere and prepare the necessary methodological and scientific grounds for introduction in Ukraine of progressive principles and mechanism of ensuring public health in Ukraine. As of now these institutions do not perform enough their functions due to lack of financing and experts that may be interested to perform such works. Research performed by such institutions is mainly of medical (laboratory) nature and have no use to the public health experts.

Not all the state institutes involved in public health research subordinate to the Ministry of Health Care and not always the public health research topics stay within the medical sphere. For example, research «Attitudes and behavioural orientations of adult population towards HIV/AIDS problems and people living with HIV/AIDS», supported and financed by the Ministry on Affairs of Family, Children and Youth of Ukraine, and conducted by the State Institute of Family and Youth Problems.

So, now Ukraine has no single organisational structure that meets the requirements of planning, running and analysing research results in the sphere of public health.

Input of International Projects into Public Health Research

International partners and donors play substantial role in running programs and conducting research in public health sphere in Ukraine. Let us have a look at major agencies offering help in conducting research in public health sphere in Ukraine.

Project CINDI. Project CINDI (countrywide integrated noncommunicable diseases intervention) is conducted in Ukraine through the facilities of the Institute of Cardiology of Ukraine. Project aims at improving health and life-style quality in community through bringing down mortality and morbidity rates, as well as disability caused by non-infectious diseases, including cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, accidents and mental disorders.

In Ukraine this research was conducted with demonstrative purposes and had the purpose of identifying the factors that may affect development of chronic diseases. It is worth noting that this project is conducted through the facilities of a medical establishment, which is not always meeting approaches of public health and therefore some non-medical factors affecting health condition may be underestimated. In line with the way to conduct

such project an organisation could have been attracted that engages directly in preventing issues and health facilitation. This could help to widen the spectrum of analysis of factors influencing health and develop mechanisms preventing origination and development of the mentioned diseases. In general, project experience and research can be regarded as positive, because they describe Ukrainian context of influence of certain factors onto the developmental patterns of non-infectious diseases, as well as laid out foundations to develop prevention measures. It should be mentioned though that this research results are not facilitating greater information awareness of population even within the demonstrative zone scope [13].

The Soros Foundation is represented in Ukraine by the International Renaissance Foundation. There is a separate programme within the Foundation «Initiatives in public health sphere» that directly engages in public health development in Ukraine. It should be noted that the programme activity is mostly directed onto support of projects that relate to practical implementation of a certain program, i.e. envisage support and services for population. Nevertheless, the Foundation also supports initiatives aimed at conducting research of monitoring nature in particular [14].

In recent years, the Foundation supported, particularly, the following researches:

- «Analysis of major directions of activities in fighting HIV/AIDS in Ukraine, development of monitoring indicators and system of information accumulation within a database», conducted by the NGO «Centre of probative medicine»;
- «Monitoring, analysis and assessment of TV programs and articles in Ukrainian mass media on tackling HIV/AIDS epidemic situation», conducted by the «Ukrainian Association of Harm Reduction»;
- «Expert training for public health sphere», conducted by an expert group.

The World Bank. Ukraine is actively co-operating with the World Bank that has supported, among other, projects on control over tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS in Ukraine. These projects do not envisage direct research of public health sphere in Ukraine, but include monitoring and general assessment of current situation in Ukraine in spreading, treatment and prevention of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, as well as study changes in these spheres as the project goes on.

The World Bank also supports research on tobacco-smoking effects upon people's health conducted by Ukrainian centre on problems related to alcohol and drugs use:

- «Reproductive health and narcotic drugs af-

fecting it», conducted by Ukrainian centre on problems related to alcohol and drugs use (supported by the World Bank and UNICEF);

- «Economics of tobacco industry in Ukraine from the public health perspective».

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This Fund provides a substantial grant to Ukraine. The national receiver of the money is International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine that in 2004-2005 supported several research projects on HIV/AIDS in line with the program „Fighting HIV/AIDS epidemic in Ukraine», the main of which were:

- Epidemiological research conducted by the Ukrainian centre on prevention and fight against AIDS by the Ministry of Health Care in co-operation with regional centres on prevention and fight against AIDS, regional sanitary-epidemiological stations and NGOs;

- «Assessment of the availability of prevention programs for schoolchildren and students», conducted by Informational-analytical agency «Statinformconsulting» in 349 schools;

- «Monitoring behaviour of injecting drug users (IDU) and women in sex-business, as a component of epidemiological supervision of the second generation», conducted by the State Institute of Family and Youth Problems in all regions of Ukraine;

- «Monitoring behaviour of men having sex with men (MSM) as a component of epidemiological supervision of the second generation», conducted by the Centre of social expertise under the Institute of sociology of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine in 7 cities and towns of Ukraine;

- «Monitoring of informational levels and behaviour of military service-men as a component of epidemiological supervision of the second generation», conducted by the Centre of social and political studies «Socis» in 10 military units and 3 higher military training institutions and in training centre for younger specialists, located in 8 regions of Ukraine.

USAID (the US governmental aid organisation) also plays an active role in pushing reforms of health care and public health policy in Ukraine. For these purposes it has supported a number of the research intended to optimise the current situation. The most well-known public health policy researches conducted by the «Policy» Project are: 1) «Effective use of resources in safeguarding reproductive health in 2001-2002»; 2) «Overcoming operational political barriers in approaches to reproductive health in Ukraine». These studies were designed to identify inefficiencies in the reproductive health

system and provide recommendations that could allow the health system to use resources more efficiently.

European Union and its structures take active part in the developing of health care, including public health system in Ukraine. EU gives financial and technical support to applied projects, first and foremost, that aim at introduction of progressive approaches to providing medical aid to population and further developing health care system in Ukraine.

The following projects are currently conducted with EU support in Ukraine:

- National pharmaceutical inspection (the project is aimed at strategy development to help reach corresponding standards; implementation of legal basis to ensure proper functioning of national regulatory inspection; specification of the laboratories that should collaborate with inspection both at the central and regional levels; obtaining certification for the mentioned inspection from WHO, etc.);
- Financing and management in the sphere of public health services of Ukraine;
- Preventive and primary actions of public health services (the project aim is to facilitate reform of health care system aimed at effective preventive and primary medical aid in Ukraine, adapted for new social and economic conditions);
- Analysis of possibilities for re-employment of medical workers in Ukraine.

It should be mentioned that these EU projects are not directed at research, even though each of them envisages performing analysis of situation before conducting pilot projects, as this is the first step to identify possibilities of performing certain measures. Other international organisations, including WHO, UNICEF, DFID, etc., and international projects (supported by the British, Swiss and other embassies and international charity organisations) also support public health research in Ukraine, including evaluation of the innovative models of health care management on local levels.

Summing up the information on the input of the international organisations into the development of the public health research in Ukraine, it is worth to stress that all the reviewed projects get financing from external donors, who are interested in running a particular policy stance or strategy to solve these problems. The facts help us understand that today's priorities of the health care sphere are not only identified by real needs of society, but also by the interest and possibilities of the international donors to run their own projects and research. The results of many researches done by the international project have rather selective and limited use for the public health policy problem definition or evaluation

of the policy interventions at the national (governmental) level.

Final Remarks

Research activities on public health issues become of greater importance in Ukraine helping identify problematic issues that require particular attention. As already stated above, nowadays such problematic issues most often are tackled by the interested foreign parties, that study them in line with their own priorities and possibilities. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the renege of problems and needs being acute nowadays in Ukraine may differ from the ones identified by the donors from various countries. It is exactly for the study and specification of problems that should be tackled immediately in Ukraine that we need to develop research in the sphere of public health. And it is exactly this direction that should be stipulated by the new strategy of reforming health care system, as currently this given direction gets insufficient attention compared to financing priorities and organisational restructuring. The link between public health research and public health policy should be really established, only in this way the multidimensional and multidisciplinary concept public health will not look as 'challenging' and 'exotic' issue for policy-makers, medical professionals and general community.

It may be also useful to widely disseminate information about EU and other international projects in Ukraine, results of their analytical activities, and to involve more Ukrainian organisations in conducting research within these projects.

At the same time, the EU public health network may enforce the governments of the EU countries and EU aids organisation to recognise the public health policy is the strategic priority of the EuroAid (Tacis) program. This will change the «stepmother's» attitude of the Ukrainian government to the public health policy and public health research, as well as provide Ukraine with the European technical assistance and expertise.

As for the strategic priorities in research that may be formative for the public health policy, more attention should be paid to such issues as:

- development of preventive medicine, analysis of possibilities available for successful models implementation in primary medical-sanitary care;
- smoking, especially passive smoking in public places and among youngsters; also some research should be done in the sphere of prevention cancer diseases and cardiovascular diseases;
- health problems caused by alcohol consumption;

- the development strategies for pharmaceutical sector, which all in all, serves a substantial contribution to development of public health sphere in Ukraine;

- options for the balance between sustainable financing the health care system and equity of the health services;

- effective for Ukrainians methods of health education, especially among young women, and promotion of the healthy life-style.

Today Ukrainian professionals have a strong will

to provide research and changes in public health sphere, but often they have lack of relevant information and experience. The newly established (and the first in Ukraine) the School of Public Health at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy acts as a potent instrument of developing principles and mechanisms of public health in Ukraine. This School is just developed but it can work in co-operation with EU networks for implementing different research and develop modern public health sphere.

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ПОЛІТИКА ТА ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ У СФЕРІ ОХОРОНИ ЗДОРОВ'Я: ЗВ'ЯЗОК, ВЗАЄМОЗВ'ЯЗОК ЧИ ЙОГО ВІДСУТНІСТЬ?

У статті проаналізовано зв'язок між: політикою охорони здоров'я та дослідженнями у цій сфері в Україні. Зокрема, автори висвітлюють такі питання: основа для розвитку політики охорони здоров'я в Україні; пріоритети та головні сфери досліджень в охороні здоров'я; структура досліджень; внесок міжнародних проектів у дослідження в охороні здоров'я (таких як «СНІД», Міжнародного фонду «Відродження», Світового банку, Глобального фонду для боротьби зі СНІДом, туберкульозом та малярією, «USAID», Європейського Союзу). Визначено перспективні напрями розвитку взаємозв'язку між політикою та дослідженнями у сфері охорони здоров'я.