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Steps to improve the teaching of public health to undergraduate medical students in Canada.

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Abstract: In Canada, recent events and global influences have led to an emphasis on enhancing the public health system and improving the training of physicians in public and population health. Responding to the World Health Organization's initiative, Towards Unity for Health, the Association of Faculties of Medicine in Canada launched its Social Accountability initiative in 2001, which included the creation of the Public Health Task Group. With representation from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian faculties of medicine, medical students, the Medical Council of Canada, and the community, the task group undertook four main steps: reaching agreement on common overall objectives for teaching public health, obtaining baseline information on the curricula of programs that were being provided across Canada, obtaining an inventory of resources available at each university, and creating a support system for fostering the development of public health teaching in undergraduate medicine programs. To date, the seventeen medical schools have nearly reached full consensus on the overall educational objectives. An initial scan of existing educational resources revealed no consistent use of any one text. Subsequent work has begun to create an inventory of sharable resources. A network of public health educators has been created and is seen as a promising start to addressing these other concerns. Other barriers remain to be addressed; these include lack of faculty (critical mass), inadequate support for local champions, inadequate methods of student assessment, and poor image as an attractive specialty/few role models.

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