

Health Officer: A Physician Assistant Comparable Role in Ethiopia

Author Profile

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A graduate from the Integrated Emergency Surgery program at the University of Gondar, Fitsum Taye Negash serves the people of his country of Ethiopia in a multitude of ways. While maintaining a position as the current Vice President of the Professional Association of Emergency Surgical Officers of Ethiopia, he has managed to juggle volunteer work with the Ethiopia for Global Youth Network, become a founding member of the World Humanitarian Community, maintain the Communication board position with the International Association of Physician Assistant Educators and be involved in improving safe surgical practices with the Ministry of Health for Ethiopia.

His establishment of Cholera Treatment Centers during the Cholera Epidemic in 2010 to assist in control of the disease as well as his continued work with subsequent Pandemic Preparedness Plans thereafter have made him a role model in the medical community. Fitsum continues to participate in revision of Ethiopian obstetric management protocols and safe surgical practices for hospitals and Health centers across the region; and has been recently awarded an “outstanding clinical practitioner” in the year 2020 by the Global Association of Clinical Officers and Physician Associates (GACOPA) for his creation of an operation service at the primary health care level which was previously limited to hospitals. Fitsum is also a technical working member of MPDSR (Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response) for both the Ethiopian Public Health institute and Ministry of health , assisting on preparing the Training Manuals for Prevention of Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia. Fitsum is an accredited Master Trainer of Trainers (TOT) on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) for Health workers in Ethiopia and works as a Medical Advisory Board Member to Mansaray Foundation in Sierra Leone.

General Information of Ethiopian Health Officer Program:

The College of Public Health at Gondar in Ethiopia created the Health Officer training in 1954 to mitigate the concern that there was no training of medical doctors in Ethiopia to meet the needs of health disparities that existed in rural communities throughout the country. Shortly after its development, the need for further training medical doctors (MD) superseded Health Officer (HO) training, putting a temporary stop on the profession. However, it was evident that public health needs could not be met with MDs alone, so the Ethiopian Ministry of Health (MOH) concluded training of Health Officers should continue. Currently, about 100 students per year will graduate with a BSc Health Officer title and move on to advanced degrees such as regular MPH, Masters in Nutrition, Masters in Reproductive health and PHD or Join Integrated innovative Masters in Emergency surgical officers or PHD Tracks. These Officers are trained and equipped with the knowledge, skills, professional ethics, and wisdom that is required to solve and manage the common clinical disorders as well as the preventable public health concerns.

Entry Criteria:

Those students interested in the becoming a Health Officer (HO) are required to complete an entrance examination along with their application. Those who choose to upgrade to a BSC Diploma need a minimum of two years of clinical service hours, a recommendation letter, and sponsorships. For private institutions, the minimum entrance examination requirement is arranged by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MOSHE), an independent Ethiopian accreditation body.

In order to advance through the levels of the BSc Public Health Officer program, 129 credit hours must be completed over four years while maintaining a C or higher in all courses. Students also are required to pass a research thesis.

Education:

There is no database where future students could access a formal list of all programs offering the HO training; however, each specific program provides information on their curriculum. An example of the typical curriculum is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Curriculum for the BSc Public Health Officer training program

Year	Coursework		Requirements
First year	<u>First year , semester I</u>		2.0 / C grade or higher in each course
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro. To public health • Health education • Biostatistics • Social anthropology • Population & development • Int.to psychology • Human anatomy I • Human physiology I • Biochemistry 		
	<u>First year ,semester II</u>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human anatomy II • Human physiology II • Pathology 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parasitology • Pharmacology • Human nutrition • Clinical laboratory method • Microbiology • Civics & ethics • Epidemiology • Int .to Environmental health & ecology • Intro. to nursing Art 		
Second Year	<p><u>Second year , semester I</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical diagnosis • Internal medicine I • Surgery I • Communicable disease • Reproductive health • Int.to computer science • Int.to health economics • Health ethics & legal medicine <p><u>Second year , semester II</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pediatrics I • Obstetrics & gynecology I • Health service management • Research methodology • Mental health • Ophthalmology • Oral health • Dermatology 		
Third Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal medicine II • General Surgery II • Pediatrics & child health II • Obstetrics & gynecology II 		
Fourth Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community health practice • Research activities • Essential surgical skill • Comprehensive /exit exam 		

Financing Education:

The MOH provides both entrance and final examination screening/approval. They will also consider financial sponsorship of applicants.

Accreditation/Regulatory Bodies:

Accreditation is provided by the MOH and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MOSHE)
<https://moshe.gov.et/>

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The Ethiopian Food, Medicine and Health Care Administration and Control Authority (EFMHACA) is the current regulatory body of Health Officers <https://fmhaca.gov.et>

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Professional Licensure:

The Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MOSHE) is the principal license provider. Successful completion with a passing grade of a licensing examination is required prior to practicing as a Health Officer.

Scope of Practices:

- a. Take medical history, undertake physical examination and order clinical lab investigations for clients/patients and makes a diagnosis to identify disease, disorder or medical conditions.
- b. Prescribe, order and administer medications for patients
- c. Advice, council and assist psychosocial aspects of illnesses to all clients seeking medical care
- d. Involve in curriculum development of health science disciplines.
- e. Perform diagnostic procedures
- f. Record information on patient's medical history, examination, diagnosis and treatment provided on the appropriate client's charts.
- g. Manage normal delivery, conduct vacuum delivery and refer complicated cases to next level for emergency Surgical interventions or consult senior if Service available within the facility.
- h. Provide integrated management of Neonatal and Childhood illnesses (IMNCI)

- i. Perform minor surgical procedures such as circumcision, manual vacuum aspiration, cyst excision after getting on job additional skills training.
- j. Certify and give testimony for medico legal cases managed by them in the health facilities.
- k. Collect, document, process and analyze health and health related diseases and information.
- l. Involve in Operational research on health and health related issues.
- m. Plan, organize and lead pandemic and epidemic preparedness plan
- n. Plan, organize, direct, supervise, monitor and evaluate health service delivery and programs at various both governmental and Nongovernment or Public and Private facilities.

Job Opportunities:

There are 3,573 BSc Public Health Officers that are practicing in health centers across the nation. Another 5,000 trainees—both HOs and those advancing to ESO/MD—will soon join this number. Thankfully, there are plenty of jobs available in public and private facilities within cities and rural communities. NGOs also will hire many of these individuals who will continue to provide significant contributions to the constituents of Ethiopia.

References

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3. “Strengthening Regulations of Health Professionals in Ethiopia.” Ethiopia Ministry of Health. Accessed January 28, 2021. <http://reprolineplus.org/system/files/resources/Learning%20Brief%20Regulation%20FINAL%2003%2025%2019.pdf>