

Headline: "CAREER AS HEALTH EDUCATOR: SCOPE AND EDUCATION"

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Career as Health Educator: Scope and Education

With healthcare increasingly turning multi-disciplinary in nature and outlook, there are several routes that a student can take to pursue a career in health education.

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By Deepak Sharma

While a healthcare career typically invokes images of Doctors, Surgeons, Nurses, Therapists, Radiologists, Dieticians and many common professionals occupying popular mind space, a career in health education is a more niche category. With time, health education as a separate course has evolved variously under the broader categories of Public Health, Community Medicine, Preventive and Social Medicine, among others.

Taking a comprehensive view of healthcare as an indispensable need for individuals, groups, and communities, a health education professional develops suitable educational and promotional strategies to further the cause of health education among the wider community. In this endeavor, he works with a host of social and community stakeholders including Hospitals and Clinics, Schools and Universities, Government offices, Businesses, Non-profits, among others. A degree or diploma or certificate in health education prepares the students for a wide range of career options: Social and Community Service Managers, Health Education Specialists, Health Promotion Specialists, Health Care Coordinators, Corporate Wellness Trainers, Alcohol and Drug Addiction Counsellor, Prevention/Intervention Specialist, among many others.

Pathways to a career in health education

To start with, it must be remembered that no undergraduate course is offered exclusively devoted to health education. With healthcare increasingly turning multi-disciplinary in nature and outlook, there are several routes that a student can take to pursue a career in health education.

One way is to do an undergraduate course in Public Health offered at several universities and institutes. Called Bachelor of Public Health (BPH) or Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BSC Public Health), this course includes a paper on health education apart from other important papers on subjects such as Social and Behavioral Health, Health Economics, Environmental Health, Health Administration, and Health System Management. The duration of these courses is four years including the time for internships and research projects. However, one must note that only students who have had a combination of Physics, Chemistry, and Biology in their 12th grade are eligible for admission to this course. And while most of the colleges admit students based on 12th grade marks, some accept students based on their performance in entrance exams conducted individually or through NEET or Graduate Pharmacy Aptitude Test (GPAT). Some of the top colleges that offer this course include Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Armed Forces Medical College, Pune, Lady Sri Ram College for Women, Madras Christian College, Presidency College, and Dr. Girilal Gupta Institute of Public Health at Lucknow University.

Another way is to directly pursue a Postgraduate course focused on Health Education. For instance, the government-owned and run National Institute of Public Health Training and Research (NIPHTR) offers a diploma in Health Promotion Education. It entertains graduates from recognised universities working in Central/State/Local Health Services or registered NGOs for at least five years. Similarly, the Central Health Education Bureau under the Directorate General of Health Services, in affiliation with Delhi University, offers a two-year full-time course for a Postgraduate Diploma in Health Education. In another example, the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata, one of the pioneering institutes in this field, offers a Diploma in Health Promotion and Education for a duration of one year.

And yet another way to equip oneself with certification and skill sets in health education is to pursue a Postgraduate program as also MPhil and Ph.D. programs in broader categories of courses in Public Health, Preventive and Social Medicine, Community Medicine all of which would most likely include an important module or paper on health education or related domains of health communication, and health advocacy. For instance, an MD (Doctor of Medicine) programme in Preventive and Social Medicine offered by a large number of private and government colleges would include a paper on Health Education as part of the syllabus with a course duration of three years.

However, only those who have obtained an MBBS degree are eligible for this course. At the same time, there are colleges and institutes which offer post-graduate courses for non-medical students too. For instance, the Indian Institutes of Public Health (IIPHs) have been founded with the vision of promoting teaching, training, and research in public health. The Master of Public Health (MPH) program offered by IIPH-Delhi particularly focuses on Health Education and Research. At the same time, IIPH-Gandhinagar gives due attention to health promotion in its MPH programme. And both cater to non-medical students too. Furthermore, PGIMER Chandigarh, JIPMER Puducherry, IIMR University, Jaipur, and Jamia Hamdard University, New Delhi offer a Master in Public Health programme also allowing non-medical students to enroll.

Thus, whether you are a medical student/professional trained in medicine but contemplating a career in health education, or a non-medical student who decided on a career path of health education, there are enough avenues available to pursue your goals and dreams in India.

