

# EDITORIAL

## DEFINING PUBLIC HEALTH AS A BASIS FOR EXPRESSING THE SUBJECT COVERAGE OF A SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL

In recent years, the need for a clear and consistent definition of the concept of public health has become increasingly evident, not only on a theoretical level but also in the context of professional publishing. For a journal such as the Central European Journal of Public Health (CEJPH), such a definition is key to determining its thematic focus, selection of contributions and long-term identity.

Internationally (e.g. according to the World Health Organisation), public health is broadly recognised as a set of organised societal activities aimed at preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting population health. This concept includes a wide range of determinants – biological, environmental and psychosocial – and often extends to health policy and organisation of health systems.

The domestic professional and legislative concept, primarily based on the Public Health Protection Act, is narrower in scope. Public health is primarily defined as population health status as influenced by natural, living, lifestyle, and occupational conditions with an emphasis on protecting health from deleterious environmental influences, infectious disease prevention, and assessment of health risks.

Ensuring adequate public health is based on two main approaches: health protection and health promotion. Health protection is primary, but unlike health promotion is not voluntary and therefore usually enforced by law.

The public health service, as a service to citizens by the state, is different to public health as such. The organisation and financing of health care or provision of health services are separate from public health.

The difference between the broader international and more specific domestic concepts of public health presents a challenge

as well as an opportunity for a professional journal. Clearly, in the Central European context it is appropriate to take a balanced approach: to respect the traditional strengths of the region, particularly in the fields of hygiene, epidemiology and health protection, whilst reflecting modern trends with emphasis on psychosocial health determinants.

In terms of CEJPHs profile, the key thematic areas are:

- epidemiology and population health indicators;
- environmental and occupational determinants of health;
- prevention and control of infectious and non-infectious diseases;
- health risk assessment;
- the relationship between psychosocial health determinants and population health.

Themes such as organisation of healthcare systems, healthcare financing or purely clinical research should be included only if they have preventive or population-associated significance.

Due attention should be paid to psychosocial risks which are internationally recognised as important public health determinants; domestically, these have hitherto been viewed marginally, particularly in relation to work conditions. However, their increasing significance in mental health and chronic diseases indicates that they should be an integral part of professional discourse and publication.

The clear definition of the public health field is not only an academical issue, but a practical tool for the orientation of the Journal. It defines identity, improves professional consistency and ensures its relevance in a rapidly developing international context.

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