Rationale for Implementing a Public Health Curriculum in Your Pediatric Residency Program

Today’s children face a number of challenges to their health, including environmental and social factors. These environmental and social determinants contribute significantly to the well-being and health outcomes of children in the contexts of families, schools and communities. Pediatricians should have the tools to address these determinants of health in addition to traditional medical treatments. In 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics put forth the first policy statement on “The Pediatrician’s Role in the Community”,¹ which describes community pediatrics as a synthesis of clinical practice and public health principles directed toward promoting the health of all children.

In 2004 the IOM proposed a new model for understanding child health that acknowledges the influences of the biological, behavioral, social and physical environments on health development. To attend to this new and emerging knowledge, the training of pediatricians must modernize to target the new skills and capacities that will be required to address the problems facing children in the 21st century, giving pediatricians the ability to influence the critical determinants of child health and well-being. In order to realize the full potential of this new understanding of child health, pediatricians must successfully merge public health, population-based approaches with traditional clinical skill sets. Past studies have recognized current pediatric residency training is lacking in providing approaches and experiences to understand the broad determinants of children’s health and development.²,³,⁴

Meeting the total health needs of children and families and optimizing the developmental outcomes in children cannot be accomplished without weaving critical skill and knowledge building opportunities into residency programs. The proposed revised Residency Review Committee guidelines for pediatrics for July 2012 state that programs must have “one educational unit of community health and child advocacy.” A public health curriculum can serve as a platform for programs upon which they can build educational experiences in community health and child advocacy.

The Pediatric Public Health curriculum project provides pediatric residency programs with a guideline of how to implement a public health curriculum, from identifying resources to choosing goals and objectives, activities and evaluation measures.