



MMS Bulletin #138

Applying Human Rights to Sexual and Reproductive Health - a Reality for All?

The Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine (ISPM)
**Promoting health and disease prevention
within Switzerland and around the world**

De Luciano Ruggia

The Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine (ISPM) follows other academic institutions by becoming a member organisation of the Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland. Its international field of work and knowledge will strengthen the Network.



(Photo: ISPM)

The Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine (ISPM) at the University of Bern was founded in 1971 and first directed by Prof. Theodor Abelin. Under its current director Prof. Matthias Egger, ISPM is organized around three core activities: teaching, research, and establishing and managing research registries and databases. ISPM's staff of over 120, 70 of whom are researchers, promote health and disease prevention both within Switzerland and around the world by conducting rigorous, interdisciplinary research to advance and disseminate knowledge of health and disease; educate university students through the postdoctoral level; and equip individuals to serve as public health practitioners who can discover and evaluate opportunities to improve health and help formulate policy at cantonal, national, and international levels.

Between 2012 and 2016, ISPM students completed 35 Masters, 18 MD, and 23 PhD degrees. Currently at ISPM, 15 Masters, 17 MD, and 32 PhD degrees are in progress. Jointly with the Swiss TPH in Basel and the EBPI in Zurich, ISPM also organizes a public health (MPH, MAS, CAS) training program. ISPM welcomes eminent speakers throughout the year and its seminars are open to the public.

Among its registry activities, ISPM is in charge of the SPITEX register, the Swiss National Cohort, some orthopedic registries, as well as a group of pediatric and rare disease registries.

ISPM has 14 research groups that bring together people with similar research interests. The groups rely upon staff and departmental resources to facilitate an interdisciplinary approach to research on topics as varied as cancer, healthy ageing, spatial epidemiology, and musculoskeletal health. Two groups particularly focus on global health issues.

Sexual and reproductive health research

The Sexual and Reproductive Health research group led by Nicola Low does international public health research. The group's projects include research funded by WHO to create "living systematic reviews" of the rapidly emerging evidence about Zika virus infection as a cause of clusters of microcephaly and Guillain-Barré syndrome. The group also is involved in the Women And Newborn Trial of Antenatal Interventions and Management (WANTAIM) in Papua New Guinea to evaluate screening during pregnancy for chlamydia and gonorrhoea to improve birth outcomes. The group leads translational research to develop a point-of-care test for the Rapid Diagnosis of Antimicrobial Resistance in Gonorrhoea (RaDAR-Go), which is aimed at improving case management and slowing the spread of antimicrobial resistance. And Epidemiology and Mathematical Modelling for Infectious Disease Control (EpiDeMMIC) examines the impact of screening, point-of-care tests, and vaccination as interventions for the prevention and control of sexually transmitted infections.

Clinical and public health epidemiology of HIV and coinfections with hepatitis B and C

The HIV and Hepatitis group headed by Olivia Keiser works on the clinical and public health epidemiology of HIV and coinfections with hepatitis B and C. Its main focus is on long-term outcomes of antiretroviral therapy (ART), the impact of ART on HIV transmission, mathematical modelling, and methodological aspects of the analysis of longitudinal data. The group uses a mixed methods approach in partnership with the Ministry of Health and local NGOs to evaluate Malawi's B+ program for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, while in Zimbabwe it has projects on third-line use and resistance testing after repeated therapy failures.

The International Epidemiologic Databases to Evaluate AIDS (IeDEA) is a research consortium of seven international centers established by the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in 2005 to develop methodology to pool data and cost-effectively generate large data sets to address high priority, evolving research questions in HIV/AIDS that are unanswerable by single cohorts. In collaboration with the University of Cape Town, South Africa, ISPM leads IeDEA-SA, which has participating cohorts located in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe that include a total of more than 900,000 patients.

ESTHER Switzerland

In February 2016, ISPM began hosting ESTHER Switzerland. This network engages Swiss hospitals and other institutions in effective and sustainable North-South partnerships to strengthen the provision of quality health services for people in low and middle-income countries, with a focus on universal health care coverage and health services. ESTHER Switzerland promotes institutional health partnerships through knowledge generation, sharing best practices, collaboration, and advocacy. ESTHER Switzerland is an active member of the European ESTHER Alliance (EEA) and supports the EEA Secretariat.

In 2015 ISPM also contributed to the design of an Ebola ring vaccination trial in Guinea under the auspices of the World Health Organization. The trial was performed as a randomized phase III trial to evaluate the efficacy and safety of one dose of either cAd3 or rVSV vaccine in the prevention of EVD when implemented in ring vaccination.



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