Essential Public Health
Theory and Practice
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Stephen Gillam, Jan Yates and Padmanabhan Badrinath
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Contributors

JENNY AMERY
Chief Professional Officer Health and Education, UK Department for International Development, London

PADMANABHAN BADRINATH
Associate Clinical Lecturer, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, and Consultant in Public Health Medicine, NHS Suffolk

CAROL BRAYNE
Director, Institute of Public Health, Addenbrooke’s Hospital, Cambridge

RACHEL CROWTHER
Public Health Consultant, Oxford

STEPHEN GILLAM
Director of Public Health Teaching, School of Clinical Medicine, University of Cambridge, and Visiting Professor, University of Bedfordshire, and General Practitioner, Luton

RICHARD LEWIS
Director, Health Advisory Practice, Ernst & Young UK

KIRSTEEN L. MACLEOD
Public Health Registrar, Bedfordshire

DAVID PENCHEON
Director, NHS Sustainable Development Unit (England)

CHRISSEY PICKIN
Deputy Director of Public Health, Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania, Australia
List of contributors

JENNIE POPAY
Professor of Sociology and Public Health, Faculty of Health and Medicine,
Division of Health Research, Lancaster University

VEENA RODRIGUES
Clinical Senior Lecturer in Public Health, Norwich Medical School, University
of East Anglia, Norwich

LINCOLN SARGEANT
Public Health Consultant, NHS Cambridgeshire

NICHOLAS STEEL
Clinical Senior Lecturer in Primary Care, Norwich Medical School, University
of East Anglia, Norwich and Public Health Consultant, NHS Norfolk Primary Care
Trust

SARAH STEWART-BROWN
Chair of Public Health, School of Medicine, Warwick University, Coventry

JAN YATES
Public Health Consultant, NHS Midlands and East
All health professionals need an understanding of the determinants of good health at population level. This has been recognised both nationally in guidance to medical and nursing schools and internationally by the World Health Organization. To help their patients through and beyond the episodes of illness that bring them into surgeries and hospitals, doctors need to understand the factors that propel patients there in the first place. Moreover, as the costs of health care increase across the globe, tomorrow’s health professionals need a sound understanding of population-based approaches to promoting health and preventing ill health.

The first edition of this book was highly commended and the second edition begins with a section covering core public health knowledge and skills. I am pleased to see that the first chapter considers public health leadership. This is crucially important for being, in the jargon of the times, ‘distributed’. All of us working in the UK National Health Service, at one level or another, share responsibility for leadership, whether clinical or managerial, and for ensuring that priority is given to preventive care or to improving the curative services we offer.

I note that the second half of the book adopts the same life-course approach to improving population health as was used in the recent White Paper on public health: ‘Healthy Lives, Healthy People’. That too stresses the importance of multi-sectoral working to tackle the main causes of mortality and morbidity from infancy onwards.

A textbook of this nature, which brings together both principles and practice in a user-friendly format, is particularly timely. Public health in England is undergoing a dramatic transformation with much of the workforce moving to local government. The issues we face as public health practitioners, such as obesity, climate change and an ageing population, become even more challenging during such transitions. This book should be valuable to students of medicine and other health professions but also to public health practitioners in other countries. The second edition, like the first, will help prepare you to tackle some of the tough health challenges we face today.

Dame Sally C. Davies
Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor
Department of Health
London
Foreword to the first edition

Myriad challenges face international health today, from the prospect of hundreds of millions of tobacco-related deaths in the twenty-first century, to the devastation of sub-Saharan Africa by AIDS, to the rise of cardiovascular and metabolic diseases in many countries still laid low by ancient communicable diseases. The tide of the tobacco epidemic is turning in Britain and in some other industrialised countries, but in these places further progress depends on greater use of proven life-saving interventions (such as those in the prevention of vascular diseases) as well as on appropriate responses to challenges posed by ageing populations, unhealthy lifestyles and major – but comparatively neglected – sources of disability such as mental and musculo-skeletal diseases.

The editors of this book have produced a lucid and thoughtful account of critical perspectives and tools that will enable students and practitioners to understand and tackle such prevailing problems in public health. This book’s appeal to health-care professionals from many different backgrounds should help to advance the interdisciplinary approach to health promotion and disease prevention that the editors themselves wisely advocate.

John Danesh
Professor of Epidemiology and Medicine
University of Cambridge
Foreword to the first edition

Public health knowledge and practice is derived from a number of different academic fields. This makes the specialty very stimulating but immediately confronts the student with a dilemma: breadth versus depth. This book strikes the right balance between the need for coverage of several relevant disciplines with the detail required to understand specific public health challenges. We all need to use the frameworks described here to locate our learning and practice.

The three-domains model of public health practice described in the introduction has utility for all health workers – and we need to reflect on the location of information we use at the intersection of the three domains. Modern information technology provides assistance to health practitioners, e.g. through search engines and internet resources, but the growth in information and specialised knowledge characteristic of modern health systems can be overwhelming. For practitioners dedicated to improving public health there is always a ‘population of interest’. For example, for the health visitor deprived families in her locality, for the general practitioner a practice population, for the director of public health a whole population and for the paediatrician or children’s lead manager a subset of that population.

The community diagnostic model and the life-course structure is welcome. This book is written to assist learning for students from many disciplines studying public health. They will benefit from the clarity of the authors’ approach, the wisdom distilled here and the recognition of our global and local public health challenges.

Tony Jewell
Chief Medical Officer, Wales
Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank family, friends and colleagues for their encouragement and ideas – and, of course, our students. In particular, we thank Jayshree Ramsurun for her unstinting support.