

Educating Health Professionals: an Intersectoral Policy Approach aligning Health & Education as Learning Systems (with other sectors)

Beat Sottas ¹⁾, Heidi Höppner ²⁾, Ilona Kickbusch ¹⁾, Jürgen Pelikan ³⁾, Josef Probst ⁴⁾

1) Careum Foundation Zurich 2) Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin 3) University of Vienna 4) Federation of Austrian Social Insurance Institutions

Health System = more than caring for patients

For historical reasons, the health system is equated with patient care, treatment and healing. Preserving health, participation, autonomy and functionality do not receive the same attention. This tradition and inequitable attitude is particularly apparent in the education of health professionals.

from a Monoprofessional mind set



However, an effective health system providing high health benefit requires diverse experts and groups of professionals with different functional skills and generalist qualifications as well as very diverse degrees of expertise.

This is why it is necessary to broaden the focus: besides caring for patients, it is mandatory that four functional fields interact in the health system:

to interprofessional & intersectoral practice

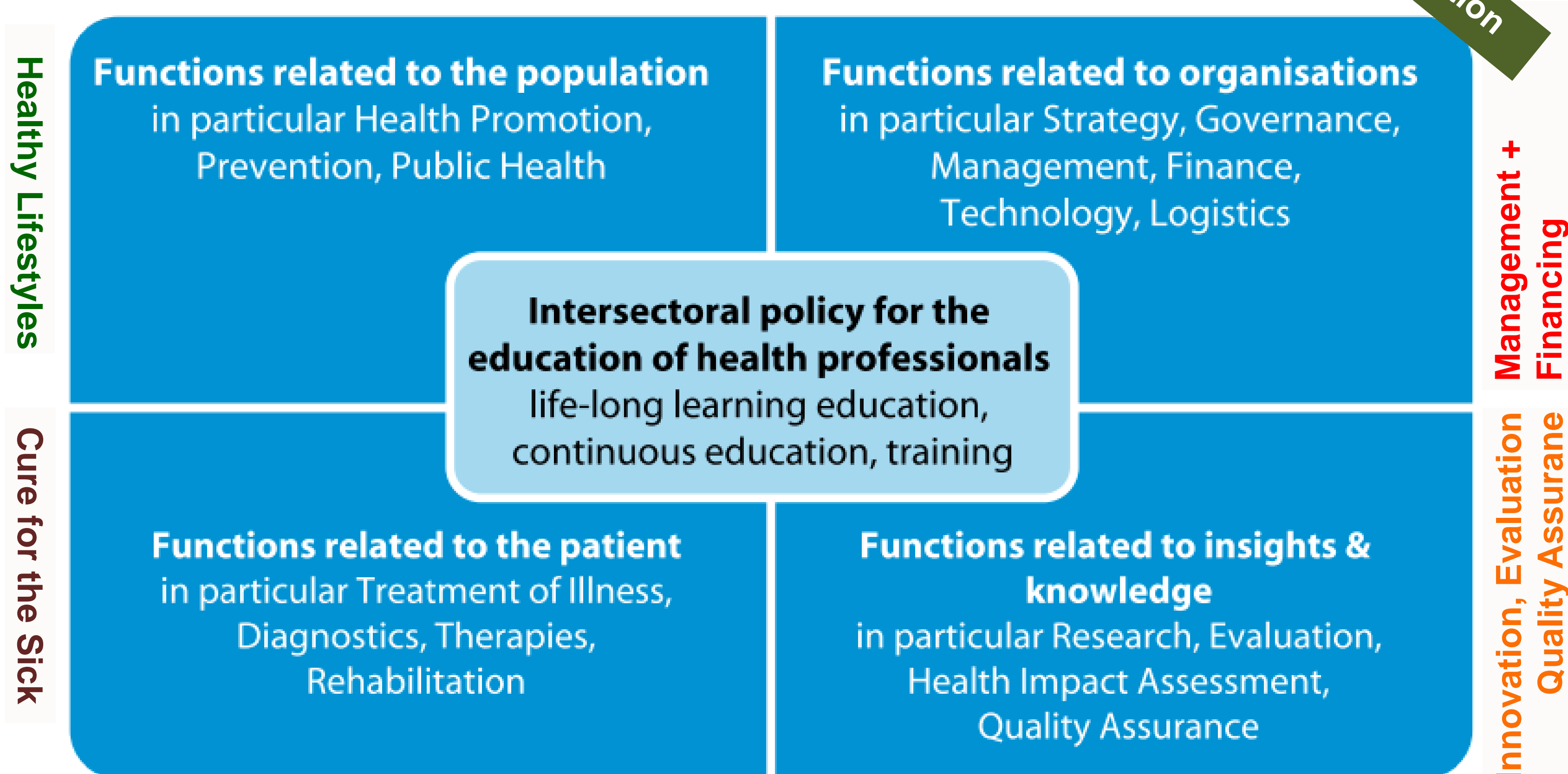


Figure 1: The four essential functional fields of the health system. Education must meet the needs of all functions – life-long and inter-professional across the boundaries of the professions and with the participation of citizens, patients and relatives. © Careum Foundation

The four functional fields are not to be equated with professions, roles or persons operating in the health system.

From the system perspective, and with a view to the challenges and needs, the question at hand is to ask which functions and roles require which competencies, specific skills and qualifications.

Outlines of a new intersectoral policy for educating health professionals

Challenges of the 21st century (demographic, social, health-related and economic) give rise to the question how well those working in the health system are prepared. Critical voices i.e. Lancet Report «Health professionals for a new century» question the relevance of established educational strategies and refer to blatant deficits and shortcomings.

The Careum Foundation participates in the worldwide debate by a reflection on aligning education and health benefits. Rather than reforming the education for patient care and treatment, it appears to be more effective to focus on the functions of the healthcare system as a whole (see Fig 1), and to derive from them activities and professional profiles necessary to cope with the challenges.

Five Postulates for a Transformation

- 1 Directing education towards health literacy and a new professional identity**
Objectives in education of health professionals must be oriented towards society's ability to innovate + health literacy of citizens. Education for the professions which work in the health system must lead to cross-functional and intersectoral thinking and a new professional attitude.
- 2 Conceptualising the intersectoral policy for educating health professionals in a comprehensive way**
The scope of a policy for the education of health professionals must be expanded. The functions related to the population, to organisational development, and to increasing knowledge must receive the same attention in regard to regulation and financing. It thus becomes intersectoral.
- 3 Having different sectors govern educational reform**
Governments having agreed on "Health 2020" framework are called upon to establish an intersectoral policy for the education of health professionals by means of appropriate objectives in legislation and appropriate budgeting.
health & education Ministers → crucial role: advocacy + coordination
- 4 Learning to cooperate: developing structures and a culture of cooperation**
Besides promoting technical expertise, the education for different functions must make the nurturing of cooperation skills a priority. This includes cross-sectoral processes, inter-professional learning in community practice etc. It requires educators who can moderate these processes of learning.
- 5 Parallel strategy for training and further education in line with future needs**
A parallel strategy of continuous further education and training is required for those that are currently working in the health system. Life-long learning and learning organisations are essential for a health system, open for innovation and reform – combined with increased health literacy of patients & citizens.

Four strategic measures aim to

- reorient health services research to four different functions
- organise the educational institutions as a health campus
- adapt legislation to the requirements, ev. restrain it
- create structures for continuous dialogue and cooperation

