


The practical irrelevance of distinguishing between public health and population health

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Dear Editor:

Recently Idrovo AJ editorialized on an ongoing debate about the differentiation between public health and population health¹, regarding environmental health determinants. While he argued for the distinctiveness of these terms, or at least, of those points of view, it can be contended that from a practical standpoint, such distinctions are not needed. As has been reported before, several authors have declared population health as a relatively new term, with no agreement as to whether it refers to a concept of health or a field of study of health determinants and promoting the debate, sometimes heated, about whether population health and public health are identical or different². This response to the editor aims to highlight the practical irrelevance of differentiating between public health and population health, emphasizing their shared goals, methodologies, and outcomes.

Considering the goals, public health and population health share a fundamental objective: to enhance the health and well-being of communities and populations. The overarching aim is to prevent disease, prolong life, and promote health through various interventions, including policy³. Both disciplines prioritize the assessment of health needs, the development of strategies for intervention, and the evaluation of health outcomes at the community or population level. As such, differentiating between the two becomes redundant when considering their core mission. However, some authors have emphasized about population health in terms of health determination specifically, about how system-level variables influence the health of populations⁴.

On the other hand, public health and population health employ similar methodologies to achieve their objectives. They both utilize epidemiological research, data analysis, and evidence-based interventions to inform decision-making processes. Both fields emphasize disease prevention, health promotion, and health education as essential components of their practice⁵. Moreover, both rely on surveillance systems, health monitoring, and policy development to address the health needs of communities and populations effectively. These shared methodologies further blur the lines between public health and population health.

Similarly, public health and population health are inherently interconnected. The health of individuals within a population directly influences the health of the community as a whole, and vice versa (Oni T, 2019), which

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highlights the futility of distinguishing between them when their aims and outcomes are intertwined. Likewise, differentiating between public health and population health has limited practical implications, particularly in terms of policy development and implementation. Policies aimed at improving the health of populations usually need to be multifaceted, involving a range of interventions that encompass both individual and community levels⁷. Whether classified as public health or population health, policies are designed to address the specific health needs and challenges faced by communities.

Finally, public health and population health professionals besides working together are indistinguishable. Professionals from various disciplines, including epidemiologists, healthcare providers, policymakers, and community leaders are crucial for effectively promoting and protecting the health of communities and populations. Focusing on differentiation could potentially create unnecessary divisions and hinder collaborative efforts that are integral to achieving the shared goal of better health outcomes.

In conclusion, the practicality of differentiating between public health and population health, either in general terms or environmental ones, is questionable or appears to be increasingly tenuous. Their shared goals, methodologies, interconnectedness, policy implications, and collaborative efforts underscore the worthlessness of drawing boundaries between these fields. Rather than perpetuating artificial divisions, it is imperative to recognize the overlapping nature of public health and population health, embracing a holistic approach to improving health outcomes. By fostering integration, comprehensive policy development and collaboration, both at academic and practical levels, we can pave the way for a unified and effective healthcare landscape that prioritizes the well-being of all.

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