Postgraduate Diploma in Health Economics Revisited

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Background

- The first Postgraduate Diploma in Health Economics was initiated in 2007 using grant funding from the Swedish International Development Agency.
- The aim of this programme was to introduce key health economics values, principles and concepts to an audience from diverse backgrounds.
- It built on materials developed by the late Professor Gavin Mooney.
Health financing reform

• Now more than ever, health economics is an important area in health policy in South Africa
  – with a National Health Insurance proposal on the table, there is a demand for health economics research and understanding in both the public and private sector
Strategic purchasing

• ‘Raising sufficient money for health is imperative, but just having the money will not ensure universal coverage’ (WHO, 2010)

• Purchasing is the critical link between resources mobilised for universal coverage and the effective delivery of quality services

• Strategic and passive purchasing
Economic evaluation

- A core skill for strategic purchasing is that of economic evaluation
- This is required to:
  - inform the range of services which can be provided within the constraints of available financial resources
  - determine the most cost-effective diagnostic and treatment interventions
  - to assess whether or not to adopt new technologies
Other skills

• Contracting with providers
• Monitoring quality of care
• Introducing and managing provider payment mechanisms
• Establishing effective governance mechanisms
New focus of the programme

• In 2015, a decision was made to re-design the Postgraduate Diploma in Health Economics with a focus on strategic purchasing of health care services with the emphasis on economic evaluation, a core skill which determines how to conduct strategic purchasing.

• The programme’s relevancy to South Africa is heightened further by the participation of only local participants from the public and private sector.
Curriculum

1. Introduction to Health Economics
2. The Economics of Health Systems
3. Priority Setting and Health Care Decision-Making
4. Key Features of Economic Evaluation
5. Economic Evaluation for Health Care Decision-Making
6. Strategic Purchasing 1
7. Strategic Purchasing 2 – Influencing Providers
8. Strengthening Progress to Universal Coverage
1. Introduction to Health Economics

*Aim:* To give students an introduction to the scope and content of the sub-discipline of health economics, and to explain the reasons why health care differs from other commodities and the basis of market failure in health care.

2. The Economics of Health Systems

*Aim:* To provide an understanding of health systems, different forms of organisation and financing of health care systems, and to introduce learners to the key elements of strategic purchasing.
3. Priority Setting and Health Care Decision-Making

*Aim:* To provide an overview of the economic and other approaches to priority setting for health care decision-making, in terms of both efficiency and equity.

4. Key Features of Economic Evaluation

*Aim:* To provide an understanding of the concepts, methods and applications of economic evaluation in health related interventions.
Modules 5 and 6

5. Economic Evaluation for Health Care Decision-Making

*Aim:* To equip students with the skills to interpret cost-effectiveness ratios and to critique published economic evaluation studies.

6. Strategic Purchasing 1

*Aim:* To develop a detailed understanding of the key strategic purchasing actions in relation to both population served and providers.
7. Strategic Purchasing 2 – Influencing Providers

_Aim_: To develop an understanding of the provider payment methods and other mechanisms that will encourage providers to enhance and maintain service quality and efficiency.

8. Strengthening Progress to Universal Coverage

_Aim_: To provide students with an overview of other actions required to promote universal coverage, and to review existing international experience of priority setting and strategic purchasing.
Mode of learning

• Mixed mode programme, offered over 24 months on a part-time basis
• At the start of each module, students receive a login and password that allows them to access the course materials from VULA (an online learning environment)
• Students are also assigned a tutor who can be contacted at any time with specific questions
Contact week

• A contact week session is offered annually which gives students the opportunity to interact with their fellow students and tutors, and to broaden skills by engaging in ‘real-life’ case studies

• Group presentations
Assessment

- Continuous assessment – there is no final examination
- Written assignments throughout the course
  - two assignments per module
  - detailed feedback is given on assignments
- Four assignments during two contact weeks
Demand for this type of learning

• In 2015, we had 107 applicants of whom 49 were accepted
• In 2016, the number of applications rose to 123 of whom 52 applicants were accepted
• Half of the registered students are government employees with more than 8 years of experience (64%)
Affordability

- As the students are predominantly full time employed, the affordability of student fees has not been an issue
  - an important aspect to consider taken the current debate about the tertiary education funding framework in South Africa
Challenges

- The main challenge for the programme is the balancing act between breath and depth in the curriculum
Summary

• The new and improved Postgraduate Diploma is a niche programme that responds directly to the current questions being asked in South Africa in light of the proposed reforms

• It is a platform that suits individuals in employment who have a need to gain these skills
http://www.publichealth.uct.ac.za/phfm_postgraduate-diploma-health-economics