

The Global Challenge in Ear and Hearing Health

Introduction

The Public Health Planning for Hearing Impairment (PHPHI) course was converted successfully to on-line teaching in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The 2021 PHPHI course will be held online in Hyderabad, India, Nairobi, Kenya, Islamabad, Pakistan, Manila, Philippines, and Harare, Zimbabwe.

I am very pleased that the PHPHI course will be held for the first time in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June/July 2021.

Hearing loss

The World Report on Hearing (2021)¹ has reported that there are 430 million people in the world who have moderate or worse hearing loss and 1153 million who have mild hearing loss. The report highlights that 80% of these people live in low and middle income (LMI) countries.

Hearing loss is a massive and neglected problem throughout the world. Hearing loss is the third largest cause of Years Lived with Disability (YLD) in the 2019 Global Burden of Disease Study².

Hearing loss is also a significant problem amongst disadvantaged groups in high-income countries.

Hearing loss delays and damages development of language in young children, slows school progress, causes difficulties obtaining and keeping a job, increases dementia in older people and leads to social isolation and stigmatization at all ages. It results in poverty for individuals and families, and massive economic costs for society.

Hearing loss is largely avoidable through appropriate prevention strategies and is generally neglected due to lack of awareness amongst health professionals and policy makers as well as the general population.

It can only be addressed on a large scale by adopting a public health approach within the existing health system.

Public health approach for ear and hearing health

The goal of the PHPHI course programme is to create a global network of health professionals trained in public hearing health to address the challenge of hearing loss.

The purpose of the course is to expand capacity building for public health knowledge and skills in ear and hearing health (EHH) amongst health professionals and health planners.

There is a huge shortage of professionals working in the field of hearing health in LMI countries and most hearing health professionals around the world need to be taught to use public health methods.

The course has developed specific content for public health approaches to hearing impairment around the world.

There have been 1501 participants from 54 countries that have been taught in 52 PHPHI courses in 13 centres since 2009. There are 9 centres in LMI countries and 4 centres in high-income countries. The majority of participants come from LMI countries (see map).

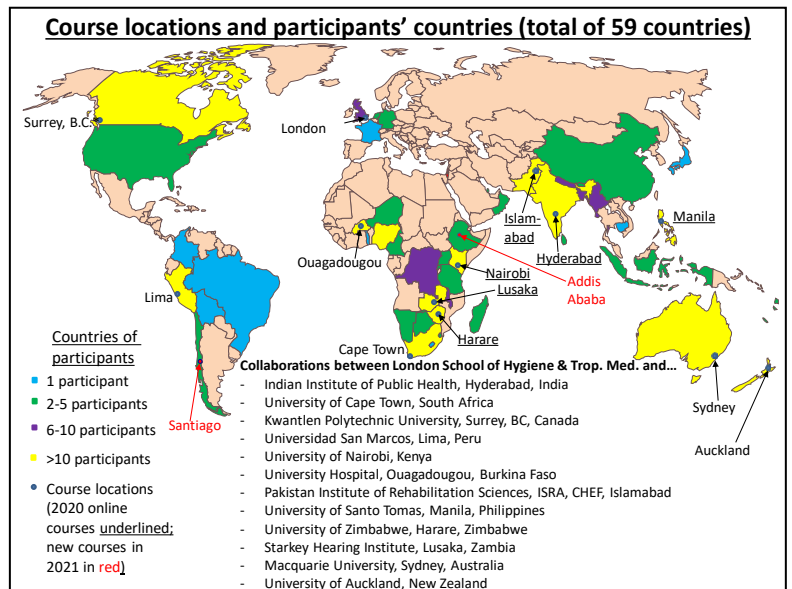
¹ World Report on Hearing. Geneva: World Health Organization 2021. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/world-report-on-hearing>

² Hearing loss prevalence and years lived with disability, 1990–2019: findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019. Lancet 2021; 397: 996–1009. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00516-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00516-X/fulltext)

The courses have attracted academics and professionals in Otology and Audiology and allied fields, and health planners from Ministries of Health and Education, and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Key outputs from the course include:

- training health professionals and local faculty in public health approaches to hearing health
- raising awareness and advocacy for hearing loss at a local level
- local assessment of needs and gaps within district health programmes
- initiating the development of national and local programmes, and specific screening programmes such as for neonates and school health.



Future planning for the PHPHI course

I plan to continue teaching the PHPHI course online because it was so successful in 2020. I will be able to reach more participants and reduce my carbon footprint in future.

I am in discussions to establish new course locations in Antananarivo, Madagascar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Kathmandu, Nepal, Muscat, Oman and Kigali, Rwanda in 2022.

Dr Diego Santana from CBM and I are in planning stages to hold the PHPHI course in Santiago, Chile, possibly in September 2021.

I look forward to the continued support for the PHPHI online course held in collaboration between each local host University/Institution and the International Centre for Evidence in Disability at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

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