

Education and Training

Training trainers in health and human rights

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The Health and Human Rights Programme in the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at the University of Cape Town has run an annual short 'Train-the-Trainer' course in health and human rights since 1998. The course is aimed at staff who teach students in the health professions and is geared to enabling staff to incorporate human rights in their curricula and to share good practice in teaching human rights in a health setting.

To date, over 220 alumni have graduated. Most have come from institutions across South Africa, but some, particularly in recent years, have been sponsored participants from other African countries, including Zimbabwe, Uganda, Zambia, Cameroon, Burundi and Botswana. Many of the alumni of the course have been able to use their learning to undertake development of new courses or revise their own existing curricula, with evidence that the course has been effective in facilitating dissemination of human rights teaching through its alumni.¹

The course is unique in that it has three themes, combining, firstly, a focus on understanding human rights and its relationship to health with, secondly, attention to curricula issues such as identifying core competencies and pedagogic strategies appropriate to teaching human rights to health professionals, and, lastly, an exploration of issues of institutional transformation as essential to 'living' rights. The last aspect of the course is particularly important in the South African context, given our history of institutionalised racism and discrimination, and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's identification of the need for human rights training among health professionals as essential to ensuring the prevention of gross human rights abuses in future.² The course assumes that, in order to teach human rights, our institutions and their teachers have to model human rights in practice. For that reason, reflection, both on past human rights abuses and current contradictions in our health context which give rise to ongoing violations of rights in post-apartheid South Africa, is essential to effective learning. Further, examining one's own institution's engagement, or lack thereof, in putting rights into practice, is key to modelling rights for our students.

The course relies on a mix of seminar and group discussion, participative learning, building on students' own experiences, extensive use of case studies and development of potential teaching materials. Past alumni participate in sharing how they have made use of the course in their teaching. Selected outside lecturers provide key inputs to particular sessions of the course – particularly related to how human rights are taken up through litigation, constitutional advocacy, civil society action, use of Chapter 9 institutions and the relationship between human rights and bioethics teaching.

The course is supported by the use of an electronic list-server aimed at facilitating networking of alumni after completion of the course. In 2006, the conveners were able to host a conference at which alumni got together to share their post-course experiences in teaching human rights, which helped to generate a more coherent approach to identifying core competencies in human rights for health professional graduates.³

This work has helped to flesh out the requirements issued by the Health Professions Council of South Africa in 2007 for training institutions to include human rights, bioethics and health law as part of the core competencies in their curricula. More information, including the training manual used on the course, is available at URL <http://www.hhr.uct.ac.za/train/train.php>.

References

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2. Baldwin-Ragaven L, de Gruchy J, London L. *An Ambulance of the Wrong Colour: Health Professionals, Human Rights and Ethics in South Africa*. Cape Town: UCT Press, 1999.
3. London L, Baldwin-Ragaven L, Kalebi A, Maart S, Petersen L, Kasolo J. Developing human rights competencies for South African health professional graduates. *S Afr Med J* 2007;97:1269-1270.