

Health inequalities – at the heart of the social work curriculum?

Cuts in public sector services are disproportionately affecting the well-being and health of social work service users and increasing the pressure on social workers. Many service users are further affected by issues of discrimination, oppression and disadvantage. Such inequalities are recognised as having a profound impact on people's health and well being (Marmot, 2010), although the role of social work in reducing health inequalities has been largely overlooked.

A model for the social determinants of health (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991) identifies the key role that social work can play in reducing health inequalities and provides a framework for practice based on challenging unfairness and the promotion of social justice. In turn this requires a shift away from individual pathology to one that incorporates a social perspective, recognising the wider impact of inequalities and drawing attention to broader population issues.

The workshop will address ways in which some of the current challenges and tensions in practice can be addressed through an emphasis on health inequalities within the qualifying social work curriculum. This approach also offers opportunities to highlight the importance of interprofessional and multi-agency practice, including the potential for building alliances to challenge the reduction in services.

The workshop is based on the presenters' experiences of curriculum development and delivery that is also relevant in the light of the national review of social work and social work education in England with its inclusion of human rights perspectives. The workshop will begin by providing a brief overview of some of the evidence regarding social work's contribution to tackling health inequalities and move on to introduce examples of curriculum material from the presenters' practice and research. This will form the basis of an interactive forum for participants to share ideas and resources.

References:

Dahlgren G, Whitehead M. (1991) *Policies and strategies to promote social equity in health*. Stockholm: Institute of Futures Studies.

Marmot, M. (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives – the Marmot Review. Strategic review of Health Inequalities in England – post2010*. www.ucl.ac.uk/marmotreview