



Information on the CHES Exam

Dr. Cruz: I'm gonna move on and talk a little bit about the health education specialists, and a little bit about the field as part of that. This is a field that hasn't been around that long. Health education as a profession started coming up with sort of a definition of this profession in or around the 1980s, and there was a [inaudible 00:00:38] project nationwide to try to figure out what is a health education specialist? And over the decade, we came up with certification as one way of establishing the standards for the profession, whereas in the past it had been a part of nursing, part of social work, part of some of the older professions. Lots of people were doing it, and you could be teaching Red Cross classes and that might be called a health education person. And you could be helping a pharmacist, and that might be called health education. So a lot of different standards. So around the 1990s, we started to develop this certification approach and competencies for it, and then a certification process. So that's what I'll talk about for a few minutes.

You've probably heard a little bit about this in [PN 501 00:01:28] in one of the introductory slides and [inaudible 00:01:34]. So we came up with certification, and at first there was this Certified Health Education Specialist, or CHES, and that's why you'll see those letters after my name after my degrees. That means that someone has reached a certain professional standard by passing an exam and taking a certain amount of coursework. And then more recently, we introduced the MCHES, which is the Master of Certified Health Education Specialist. And if you've been a CHES for five years or more, and you have certain academic background, you can apply for that. The first one, CHES, you pass with a multiple choice exam held twice a year. You have to take one of those exams and pass it. And the second one, you have to submit basically a portfolio of your background and training in order to get an MCHES.

So it's a way of demonstrating that you are a professional health educator. It indicates to employers that you're pretty serious about the profession, that you've gone the extra mile and taken this exam, and that every year you take continuing education courses to stay up in your field, stay current. You have to take at least 15 units a year, or you can stretch that out and take them over a five year period. You can take them all the last year if you want. Basically, 70 units of continuing education every five years. And that can be courses you take online or conferences that you go to, or it could be things that you do. So I get my units by taking half of that in courses. Many of them are online courses, and there are all kinds of courses. Learning about why my brother has diabetes and how I can help him as a family member, or learning how to do emergency preparedness in my community, or all kinds of courses. So you decide what you want and there's a bazillion courses that you can take, or you can go to conferences that offer these continuing education units [inaudible 00:03:45].

But it shows that you stay up in your field. You're current. So many employers will put 'CHES preferred' in their job openings. Not a huge number, but a growing number. And it's particularly common among health departments looking for a health education person, that they'll prefer a CHES person. It means that you have competencies in seven



areas. These seven areas I'll outline in a moment. The whole field of health education allows you to practice without the CHES. You don't need it in order to work in the field. And a lot of the work in the field can be done without the seven competency areas that they want you to demonstrate. But in general, we think of CHES and Health Education Health Promotion as aligned here really closely. It shows that you have competencies in seven areas and that you're really prepared to jump in and work in a variety of different settings.

So these are some of the most common settings: Agencies, governmental agencies, schools and colleges and universities as a school health educator, corporations and businesses as a wellness educator, hospitals in mental health, communication services, health education client services, and lots more positions. And it means that you could coordinate programs, you could deliver health education directly, you could provide linkages between different professionals. My first job after my [MPH 00:05:26] degree was training family clinic professionals in this central region, people who work for the federally funded family planning programs. And so I served as a resource expert and a networker among the family planning clinics for this federal region. But that's an example of the types of job you can get after you graduate.

Some of these touch on other areas in which they traditionally have been covered by different specialties. One person asked about mental health services, another about evaluation. We find that often health educators tend to work in a particular health area, so they tend to have expertise on a few health topics. They tend to work in a variety of different settings. You could decide you really want to specialize in schools or in hospital settings or in health departments, or out in community-based or governmental organizations or more. You may have certain specialty areas, like HIV and AIDS or heart disease or family planning or tobacco control. And you may specialize in certain populations, like immigrants, Latino youth, or older Southeast Asian populations, so there may be specialty areas. And a lot of the focus of this work is on health equity and improving health conditions and improving health disparities. Average salary as of last year was about \$62,000, but can be higher or lower.

I mentioned some of these benefits. It shows you have achieved a certain high professional standard and that you take this very seriously. You stay updated in your profession. Other benefits include networking with the National Health Education Credentialing Organization, getting newsletters about the field and finding out about continuing education opportunities, many of them free. And if you belong to one of the professional organizations like SOPHE, the Society of Professional Health Education, then you may get free job postings from that organization.

In order to qualify, you need a Bachelor's, a Master's, or a Doctorate and you need a major in health education or community health education or public health education or school health education. That means you could have a Bachelor's degree with a major in health education or potentially health promotion, and you could potentially qualify to take this exam. Or you could have a Master's in public health in one of our many tracks, not necessary health education, but you need at least 25 semester hours that fulfill the seven competencies. One of the myths about this degree is that you have to have taken



the health education health promotion track. You don't need to. You just need these 25 semester hours.

And they need to be in these areas. These are the seven competency areas. There's competencies about being able to assess problems in a community and determine what those problems are. There's program planning competencies. There's being able to carry out and implement health education programs, being able to evaluate [inaudible 00:08:53] assessments and evaluations and outcomes and do research. Not advanced research, but basic level academia, logical or program research. You should be able to administer programs, so not just implement and lead it, but also know how to manage budgets and objectives and personnel. You should be able to communicate and advocate to get some good health communication skills and ideas about advocating for issues and community organizing and being a resource person. So those are the seven competency areas.

The exam has questions in each of those areas. So if you complete the health promotion track, you have most of those competencies and you can probably pass the exam by doing just a bit of studying. One thing to do is probably get ahold of this book. It's \$60. Or maybe it's a bit more now. There's a lot of books that are out there. This is the best one. It's got sample exams in the back. You can take those, see where you are weak, which of the seven areas you're weak in, and then really study the sections in the book on those areas, and then maybe you need to read a bit more in something. Maybe you're not real strong on certain health promotion theories, like [inaudible 00:10:10]. That seems to be a darling of the exam that they like to ask about. Or maybe you're not certain of the difference between impact objectives and outcome objectives and other kinds of objectives, so you want to study up on that. So you can read through this book, take the exams at the end, and then study more. If you're not certain if you'd qualify for the exam, you may want to pay an additional \$40 and get your credentials screened ahead of time and they'll tell you if you qualify for it.

You can apply twice a year. The exam is in April and in October, so we just had the exam a week or two ago. It's only two weekends of the year. You want to sign up for one of those two. If tells the locations throughout the U.S. [inaudible 00:11:01] location has been Cal State, L.A. on a Saturday morning. About a three hour exam. It's expensive, but it's less expensive if you're currently a student, so it's a good idea to sign up towards the end of your health education program and sign up while you're still a student and you'll get a discount. It's \$110 versus as high as \$280, or \$330.

And then it's a multiple choice exam. It's about three hours. Some of the questions will be about graphs and they'll ask you to interpret them. There will be some questions in each of the seven areas. And then you find out a few weeks or a month later if you've passed or not. If you've passed, then you're certified for five years. Every year you have to pay a renewal fee. Not very much, I think it's like \$50 for a year. And you send in, register online if you completed any continuing education units. For example, I won't do this, but I could probably get an hour or CE credit for giving this presentation today. So if you gave a presentation to a community, you could potentially get CE units for that. If you are involved in a journal article, you could get CE units for that. So half those units



could be things you do or a journal article that you read and you answer some questions about. Things that you do informally on your own, or things that you present. And then the other half are actual classes that you take. And so every year you'd let them know what you've done, and then at the end of those five years it'll automatically be renewed for another five years.

And then there's lots of continuing education opportunities. Nowadays with online courses, you can take all your units just with online courses if you wish.

So if you want to find out more, this is the website. You really want to check this out. They have brochures, they have the application, they have how to order a study guide and the list of CE opportunities and a lot more details. So let me ask you, now that you've heard a little bit about this exam, what kinds of questions do you have about it?

Let me see. Are those courses free or is there an additional cost? Well, there's a lot of free courses, but they're often commercially sponsored. So, Pepsi sponsors all kinds of courses on Diabetes, which I think is really ironic, but they're actually pretty good courses. Maybe it's guilt out of Pepsi contributing to diabetes, I don't know. But they seem to be concerned about diabetes and nutrition. And there's lots of other courses like that that are available, one hour courses or three or four hour courses. There are many courses provided by the federal government. Usually those are no charge. Some of them are in-depth courses. I took one course that was 8 or 12 hours just on health disparities, so it was free. And then was 8 or 12 units. You can often get the units right away, or they come to you at the end of the month when the course providers make sure everyone has taken it, and make sure that you've met the requirements for the course. Typically, you take the course and then you answer a few questions at the end. It's a pretty simple exam. If you pass that, you're done with the course. Some of them, there's a charge for them and it could be \$15-50 per unit for these courses, so it's up to you if you want to pay or take them for free.

Any other questions about the exam? Well, I don't want you to be scared of the exam. If you're interested in it, it will always look good on your resume, but it may not be necessary if you have an [MPH 00:15:21] degree in a health education and health promotion. That's the main thing people will look at. And of course, they'll look at what have you done and where have you done your practicum, how did you network, all of those things. But it can be an added edge and it's certainly worth it to stay current with the field. I really like it because it makes me always be thinking about new courses and new directions. And I get training, cross-training in things that I wouldn't otherwise get training in. I think one of the things that happens after you finish your Master's degree is you may not have some of the opportunities for cross-training into new areas with new mentors, and this is a way that it really keeps you in touch with those training opportunities.

So, let me know if you have other questions about it.

