Attempt to assess Canada’s expertise in global health research falls short

Theresa W. Gyorkos

Abstract
The recent article by Nagi et al. (Health Res Policy Syst 18:37, 2020) considerably underestimates the size of the global health research community in Canada as well as its geographical distribution, its breadth and depth of experience and expertise, and its overall contribution to addressing the world’s greatest global health priorities. Global health researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, strategists and funders/donors would benefit from a more accurate in-depth and comprehensive analysis.

Keywords: global health, expertise, Canadian, assessment, research, health policy, funding, rapid environmental scan methodology, underestimation, bibliometrics

Main text
The article by Nagi et al. [1] attempts to assess Canada’s expertise in global health research. Unfortunately, this attempt falls short because of important flaws in all three metrics of its ‘rapid environmental scan methodology’ (i.e. global health research funding inputs, global health research activities and global health research outputs). The use of a ‘rapid environmental scan methodology’ as described in this context is inappropriate and results in misleading conclusions.

Restricting global health funding inputs to funds awarded only by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research disregards the funding success of Canadian global health researchers in competing for millions of dollars in research awards from Global Affairs Canada, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Wellcome Trust, the World Bank, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to name but a few.

Restricting global health research activities to training programmes, Research Chairs programmes and WHO Collaborating Centres disregards other activities in which global health researchers from across Canada play a crucial role (e.g. The Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research (CCGHR), the Canadian Society for International Health (CSIH), the Canadian Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases (CNNTD), and Working Groups and Expert Panels of WHO, to name but a few). Mention should also be made of the inaugural listing of over 100 Canadian women, many of them researchers, which was prompted by an initiative of the Lancet in recognising the contributions of women in global health [3].

Restricting global health research outputs to PubMed citations using a search strategy that only included ‘Global Health’ as a MeSH heading and author affiliation as ‘Canada’ disregards the enormous contributions made by Canadian global health researchers to the published evidence base of many of the world’s top global health research priorities. For example, using the same time span of the major funders of global health research. In 2019 alone, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded a total of US$19,194,988 to researchers in six Canadian universities (including their affiliated hospital-based research institutions) in its Global Health programme [2].

This comment refers to the article available at https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-020-00635-4.

Correspondence: theresa.gyorkos@mcgill.ca
WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Parasite Epidemiology and Control, Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health, Faculty of Medicine, McGill University, Purvis Hall, 1020 Pine Avenue West, Montreal, Québec H3A 1A2, Canada

© The Author(s). 2020 Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article’s Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article’s Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/. The Creative Commons Public Domain Dedication waiver (http://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/) applies to the data made available in this article, unless otherwise stated in a credit line to the data.
(i.e. from January 1, 2013, to March 1, 2018), Canadian global health researchers were authors in 1456 peer-reviewed publications on HIV/AIDS, 1251 publications on tuberculosis and 632 publications on malaria (PubMed accessed 10 April, 2020, using the search terms “Canada” and “HIV/AIDS”, “tuberculosis” and “malaria”, respectively), eclipsing the total of 882 publications for all of global health research reported in the Nagi et al. [1] article. It should also be emphasised that the evidence base for key aspects of global health research, as defined by Nagi et al. [1] themselves (e.g. including health systems and health policy, among others) would require a much broader bibliometric analysis than that presented.

Conclusions
In summary, the Nagi et al. [1] article considerably underestimates the size of the global health research community in Canada as well as its geographical distribution, its breadth and depth of experience and expertise, and its overall contribution to addressing the world’s greatest global health priorities. Global health researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, strategists and funders/donors would benefit from a more accurate in-depth and comprehensive analysis!

Acknowledgements
Not applicable.

Adherence to national and international regulations
Not applicable.

Author’s contributions
The author(s) read and approved the final manuscript.

Authors’ information
Professor Theresa Gyorkos is the Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Parasite Epidemiology and Control and a Professor in the Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health at McGill University. She has been a global health researcher for over 30 years.

Funding
Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials
Not applicable.

Ethics approval and consent to participate
Not applicable.

Consent for publication
Not applicable.

Competing interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

Received: 26 April 2020 Accepted: 17 September 2020
Published online: 03 November 2020

References
1. Nagi R, Rogers Van Katwyk S, Hoffman SJ. Using a rapid environmental scan methodology to map country-level health research expertise in Canada Health Res Policy Syst. 2020;18:37 https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-020-0543-x.
2. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Awarded Grants. https://www.gatesfoundation.org/how-we-work/quick-links/grants-database?q=k=canada&page=7. Accessed 10 Apr 2020.
3. Canadian Society for International Health. Les femmes canadiennes en santé mondiale/Canadian Women in Global Health. Ottawa: CSIH; 2018.

Publisher’s Note
Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.