

Table 3 Themes and representative comments from the public health expert key informants (n = 13) for the three areas of inquiry, 2015–16

Theme	Representative comments
Area of inquiry 1: Knowledge and skill sets frequently used in surveyed public health organizations	
Basic public health science (knowledge) and associated skills	<p>“With frequent epidemics in KP [i.e. in this region], our team is routinely involved in epidemics investigation.”</p> <p>“Our organization leads the efforts to deal with nutritional and MNCH related emergencies which are quite frequent in our disaster-prone province.”</p> <p>“Here [in our organization], the quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation functions are taken very seriously and are frequent.”</p>
Communication and writing skills	<p>“Writing – be it proposal writing or just a simple report – is the single most important activity done in our organization.”</p> <p>“To be successful here [in our organization], you must be a people person with good interpersonal skills and an ability to work in diverse communities.”</p>
Analytic skills	<p>“Literature review, or information gathering in general, is a frequent task assigned to our employees.”</p>
Health management skills	<p>“Management of the community staff in the field is something we do on daily basis.”</p> <p>“Our immunization-related field workers have most often got basic nonmedical qualifications. With increasing distrust among communities regarding immunization, managing this human resource poses additional challenges.”</p>
Area of inquiry 2: Knowledge and skill sets that the fresh graduates most commonly lack	
Lack of practical public health skills	<p>“Most of them [the existing public health graduates in Pakistan] are lecture-based trainees and have no hands on experience.”</p> <p>“Almost always we end up giving the practical skills from scratch.”</p>
Deficient theoretical knowledge	<p>“If you are trained in Pakistan, I would like you to know at least the basics of communicable disease control, and epidemics investigation.”</p> <p>“In my opinion, the graduates have limited knowhow of the existing health policies at the provincial or even national level.”</p> <p>“Our [locally trained] graduates are not aware of the local public health infrastructure.”</p>
Communication-related skills	<p>“In Pakistan, when you are working in the field for promotion of vaccination or family planning, good interpersonal communication skills are vital. That’s why we cannot afford someone with poor communication skills.”</p> <p>“Evaluation of MPH graduates should be on the basis of assignments that check critical thinking in addition to writing skills. It doesn’t seem like it’s being done”</p>
Limited information technology orientation	<p>“Forget about a hi fi [sic] data [management] software, the graduates don’t know the basic [MS] Excel [functions].”</p>
Area of inquiry 3: Knowledge and skill sets that will get increasingly relevant in near future	
Health system strengthening with system thinking mind set	<p>“Skills related to drafting and implementing contracts will become important in future. Government will have to make contractual agreements with private sector partners [for health care delivery], we [public sector] just can’t do it all.”</p> <p>“Skills required for leading change in a constantly evolving [Pakistan’s] health system are desperately required of public health professionals.”</p>
Health care information technology	<p>“There is a strong [international donors’] push towards transparency and accountability; and to ensure efficient documentation and reporting information technology’s role will grow.”</p>
Leadership and management skills	<p>“With the state of law and order, and community distrust we have in Pakistan, cultural competence becomes even more important.”</p> <p>“We will need growing number of experts that can lead response teams for health related emergencies.”</p>

KP = Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

MNCH = maternal, neonatal and child health.

MPH = Master of Public Health.