Inequity Kills: Taking the Statement to Heart in Social Medicine Practice

Amy C. Finnegan - February 8, 2023

Today's Objectives

Following this session, we will be able to:

- Define social medicine
- Explain the importance of praxis in social medicine
- Interrogate the white savior complex
- Understand why collective organizing efforts are so integral to social medicine practice
Determination of Health

“the conditions in which people live and work that affect their opportunities to lead healthy lives”

-Labonté and Schrecker (Part I) 2007

Source: 2007 Western Cape Burden of Disease Study

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COLONIZATION

SUPREMACISM

WHITE SUPREMACY
MALE SUPREMACY
HUMAN SUPREMACY

CAPITALISM

SLAVERY
GENOCIDE
FEMICIDE/DV
ECOCIDE

“INVISIBLE” LABOR
“RESOURCE” GRAB
INFLAMMATION

EXPLOITATION OF “RESOURCES”

Rupa Marya, MD
Wealth measured by # of citizens that are Billionaires

Infant Deaths
“What [our] history also demonstrates is how a sustained imbalance in power that consistently benefits some over others can become reinforced in the systems and structures that affect decision making and resource allocation.

In other words, those who lack power experience inequities in opportunity and health…

Advancing equity, therefore, requires attention to power (as a determinant) and empowerment, or building power, as a process.”

Who has power?

Source: Conception of power elaborated by Gene Sharp
https://trainings.350.org/resource/understanding-power/

“If politics is medicine on a large scale, as Virchow suggests, then it follows that a truly social medicine must incorporate education, training and ultimately action addressing the large-scale factors that determine health.”

Social Medicine

An approach to health that recognizes the centrality of the social and structural determination of health, integrates social theory to understand social forces that marginalize and harm communities, and builds collective power to challenge oppression and support the struggle for social justice.

\[ \text{desire to make change} \neq \text{capacity to make change} \]
The White Savior Industrial Complex

“His good heart does not always allow him to think constellationally. He does not connect the dots or see the patterns of power behind the isolated ‘disasters.’”

There is much more to doing good work than “making a difference.” There is the principle of first do no harm. There is the idea that those who are being helped ought to be consulted over the matters that concern them.”
The White-Savior Industrial Complex

TEU COLE  MAR 20, 2022

If we are going to be extraordinary, due diligence is a minimum requirement.

• Being extraordinary

• Finding purpose

• Being right & good

• Avoiding Examination of Oneself & the Conditions that Enable Suffering


Antidotes to the White Savior Complex

• Lineage

• Humility

• Curiosity

• Accountability

• Invite Critical Feedback

• Purposeful Reflection on Structural Determination

Image source: https://twitter.com/NoCopsNoMasters/status/1366103752692924418/photo/1

Image adapted from A Model for Critical Thinking Within the Context of Curriculum as Praxis, Joan S. Ford, RN, PhD; Joanne Profetto-McGrath, RN, BScN, BA; Med Journal of Nursing Education, 1994;33(8):341-344.
A Living Room Conversation in Chicago

October 2015

what we had:
• Social medicine courses in Haiti (3) and Uganda (5)
• Sustained relationship with people and communities
• Shared dissatisfaction with mis-education of health professionals
• A desire to forge something different together

The Goal: Drive a global transformation in health professional education that deepens engagement with social medicine as a core component of training

The Unrefined Approach: Foster a global community of individuals, organizations, and institutions with shared values, vision, and capacity to reach the goal
Consensus Statement
April 7th, 2017
540 signatories

Achieving Health Equity This Generation: The Case for Social Medicine
A Consensus Statement by the Social Medicine Consortium

Why Raise Our Voice?
We have participated in and been complicit with broken health systems whose principles and systems don’t lead to healthier communities.
We have heard the voices of patients throughout the world whose tragic stories of sickness plead for more just, equitable health systems and care.
We have witnessed politics that tolerate xenophobia, racism, sexism, and unregulated capitalism without any accountability.
We have observed economic and social systems that routinely fail to affirm the dignity of all humans and ignore the tremendous assets of all communities.
We have trained in educational systems that acknowledge very little or none of this.
We refuse to stand by and let this happen.
Social Medicine is our response.

What Change Do We Seek?
Social and economic inequities are a root cause of health disparities throughout the world. These inequities drive morbidity and mortality in tragically predictable ways that preferentially affect the poor and marginalized. They are perpetuated by factors including racism, sexism, economic policy prioritizing productivity and profit, and disregard for historical injustices. We can and must take action to address these root causes of ill health that we as a society have created and sustained.
The Gardener’s Tale

- Racism
- A system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call “race”) that
  - Unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities
  - Unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and
  - Saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources

Camara Jones

Creating new language …

What would you call this phenomenon?

“A historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and people of color for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.”
The Campaign Against Racism works to dismantle structural racism and its effects on health around the world by supporting local actions, efforts, and networks which aim to improve the health and lives of those most affected by racism, because racism kills.

Program Vision The Campaign Against Racism is organized to uncover the historical connections between racism and capitalism to radically imagine a future in which sociocultural, political and economic systems work towards health equity, rather than against it. We employ tactics of formalized reflection on the role of racial capitalism in each chapter’s work and experience.

http://www.equalhealth.org/campaign-against-racism
Deepening our analysis to **racial capitalism**

“Capitalism and racism did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of racial capitalism dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide.”

- Robin D.G. Kelley
Sustaining the Global Struggle for Health Equity Locally: Building Across Difference

June 2019 in Jaltenango de la Paz, Chiapas, Mexico

Global Social Medicine Summit: Building Community, Critical Consciousness and a Movement for Health Equity

October 2020 online
“Organizing is both strategic and therapeutic – strategic because our collective labor and voice are greater than the sum of their parts; therapeutic in the sense that the activist Grace Lee Boggs articulated: ‘Building community is to the collective as spiritual practice is to the individual.’ When we recognize ourselves not as individual actors each isolated in an exam room, but as a collective joined in common cause, we start to feel less alone.”

- Leo Eisentstein 2018

“To Fight Burnout, Organize.”

Thank you
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