Case Studies in Primary Health Care: Lessons Learned

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Sharing of Ideas: Carl Taylor and Bob Lawrence

- Looking back can reveal what is really important for today
- Carl is very concerned about the growing disparities in health
- *Equity* is emerging as the key ethical issue in primary health care
Virchow in the early 1800s said that the fundamental mission of health care is to afford everyone an equal opportunity to fulfill the natural lifespan.

Internationally, the U.S. health system is viewed as being the best in terms of its technical achievements. However, it is a very distorted system when disparities are considered.
Failings of U.S. Health Care—and What Can Be Done

- Disparities can be addressed at many different levels
  - Including uninsured and underinsured
- Failure of the system to utilize the resources of the community to address the fundamental social determinants of health—problems for which there is not a simple technical fix
- Pierre Trudeau, as Prime Minister of Canada, initiated the LaLonde Commission to examine health disparities; it found that:
  - Health care access accounted for 20%
  - Unanswered questions in biology were 20%
  - Environmental issues were 20%
  - Lifestyle and behavioral factors accounted for 40%
- Community resources can be mobilized to:
  - Help people understand and implement dietary and behavioral changes
  - Obtain social support
  - Provide access
In preparation for the Alma Ata conference, there was a total mismatch between what the experts were thinking and what was really going on in countries.

There was very little evidence to support planning decisions.

Argument between developed and developing countries about:
- “HEALTH for all”
- “Health FOR ALL”

Are we ready to be more realistic in reviewing current evidence?
Polarization between Comprehensive, Selective PHC

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- It is time to bring these perspectives together
  - Some vertical programs are necessary
  - Behavioral and chronic disease require different approaches
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  - Empowerment of women and social determinants of health
- Mothers are the most important health care workers in the world
Appropriate Technologies for Health

- Profit motive drives the technical fixes over the others
- Since World War II, there has been more emphasis on “the right for participation” at the household, workplace, or national level
- However, no similar studies have been done with low-income groups
- From a human rights framework, the emphasis on universal access addresses this right for participation
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- Starting to build ethical principles around *community-based participatory research*, which enhances their capacity to develop
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- Martin Luther King said “The moral arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice”
“Health for All by the Year 2000” can now be viewed as one of the first millennium development goals.