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## Equity in Health

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# Equity in Health

## ■ Learning objectives

- Define *equity* as it relates to health status and to health care
- List the main reasons that the health of others is important to all
- Discuss the central features of utilitarianism
- Contrast Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* with utilitarianism in respect to equity issues
- List the steps needed to monitor for equity in health care

## ■ References

- Braveman, P., and Gruskin, S. (2003). Defining equity in health. *J Epidemiol Community Health*, 57, 254-258.
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justice-distributive/>
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/>



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## Section A

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Background

# Review: Measurement Components

- Mortality
  - CFR
  - Expectation of life at onset and at death
- Disability and its components
  - CDR
  - Extent of disability
  - Duration

# Review: Valuing Components

Valuing future life as compared to present:

Discounting

Valuing a given duration of life:

Different value for life lived at different ages?

Valuing productivity:

Economic and social

Valuing equity in relation to efficiency

# Equity in Health

- Definitions of *equity*
  - Sense of fairness for all
  - Level playing field
  - To each according to need?
- Types of equity/equality
- Equity in health
  - Health status
  - Health care
- Principles of distributive justice and human rights

# Equity and Equality

- Measures of equality in health
  - Equal health status for all
  - Equal resources for health to all
  - Equal opportunity to be healthy
  - Equal access to health services for all
  - Equal resources for equal needs
  - Equal healthy life gain per dollar expended

## Surveillance for Equity, Carl E. Taylor

- Equity is not only morally right, it can also help make primary health care more effective and efficient
- Equity is distribution of benefit according to demonstrable need
- Surveillance for equity—a management tool that fits synergistically with a moral imperative

# What Is Equity?

- Whitehead and Dahlgren
  - Inequalities count as inequities when they are avoidable, unnecessary, and unfair (see table)
  - In the context of health care, equity means care according to need
  - This requires identifying differential need so that care can be according to need
- Braveman et al.
  - Systematic differences between groups

# Determinants of Differentials of Health Status

- Which categories are inequitable?

Determinants	Avoidable	Acceptable to society
Biological variability	No	Yes
Freely chosen behavior		
▪Health damaging	Yes	Yes (?)
▪Health promoting	Yes	Yes
Imposed behavior		
▪Health damaging	No	No
▪Health promoting	No	Yes
Environmental hazards	Yes	No
Access to health care	Yes	Yes
Health-induced poverty	Yes	No

# Determinants of Differentials of Health Status

- Which categories are inequitable?
  - “Inequity”—differences in health that are unnecessary and avoidable AND unfair and unjust (Whitehead, 1990)
  - But exempting health differentials due to natural biological variation may not be okay—conditions biologically or genetically determined may become “fixable.” In time, conditions presently considered inevitable may cease to be inevitable.

# Equity in Health

- The importance of inequities in health: why the health of others matters
  - Externalities of other people's health
    - ▶ Increased productivity can lead to benefit for all (beyond what is returned to the individual with improved health)
  - Decreased health care costs
    - ▶ To the extent that financing of health is carried out by public funding or insurance (public or private for those in the pool)
  - Altruistic satisfaction
  - Health care as a basic right (in the legal as well as moral sense)
  - Wilkinson's notions (*Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequalities*)
    - ▶ Equitable societies are healthy societies