

Some Conceptual Issues Concerning Health and Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

The present paper argues that equity and human rights perspectives can add considerably to health institutions' efforts to engage in the war against poverty and ill health, and focusing on poverty is essential to operationalising those commitments. The twin principles of equity and human rights dictate the need to strive for equal opportunity for health. This becomes especially pertinent for those groups of people who have suffered marginalization or discrimination of various sorts for historical reasons. The paper proposes that health institutions can deal with poverty and health within a framework encompassing equity and human rights concerns in five broad-spectrum ways: (1) institutionalizing the methodical and regular application of equity and human rights perspectives to actions concerning public health; (2) strapping and expanding the public health functions beyond health care that create a positive environment for effective health; (3) executing just and unbiased health care financing, which helps diminish poverty while increasing access for the poor; (4) ensuring that health services respond effectively to the major causes of preventable ill-health among the deprived and underprivileged; and (5) monitoring, promoting and taking action to address the potential health equity and human rights implications of policies in all sectors affecting health, not only the health sector.

The paper proposes that an indispensable trait needed by those working in both public health and human rights is sanguinity. Such optimism is conceived as a basic need in large part because of the appalling situations in India as well as in the world in terms of community health. While addressing the challenges posed by the country and global public health and human rights crises, sanguinity must be joined with a critical view of the structural causes of the challenges. There is an absolute need to stand against social structural inequities that exist at different levels as the result of inequitable power structures.

The solution is complex but certainly achievable with professional commitment, intellectual honesty, critical comprehension and societal dedication. Through the use of leadership skills, creativity, and optimism, coupled with an eye towards correcting unjust power structures and eliminating inequities through rights-based approaches, a clear pathway can be paved through the intersection of health and human rights in order to move further towards the realization of the right to health and other human rights envisioned by many leaders in this area.