

Healthy Municipalities
“Now, it is the only way to go!”
ABRAHAM HORWITZ AWARD LECTURE
Leonard J. Duhl, MD¹

For most of my professional lifetime, I have been preoccupied with the fact that medical care accounts for only 10 percent of what is health. Indeed, medicine is affected by factors outside the fields of direct medical care. It was for this reason that I became concerned with community.

Community can be defined in many ways. However, the focus upon individuals' and institutions' ability to deal with life problems to me is one of our most important issues. The current language, is “the building of personal and social capital.” Healthy Cities is not a program or project in the conventional sense. Rather, is set if individualized process for communities and peoples' to learn how to improve their quality of life.

We have used the words Health for All, primary health care, health promotion, and healthy public policy to broaden our scope of concern. They have stood for creating complex systems, that increase access, create equity, and active participation by people in their own lives¹. It is not difficult to present figures showing great inequities in human rights, ownership of capital by the poor², health resources, usable income, the presence of AIDS, diarrheal disease and depression. In all these cases and more, we need increasing awareness of the complex interacting systems, and the variety of players involved in both promoting well being and entering the disease cycle early and effectively.

When I began my work with broad participatory community systems and health, these ideas were rejected by the highest of medical authorities, in my own and other countries and in WHO, and UNICEF Fortunately, some are now saying, “it's the only way to go!³”. I quote the UNDP Development Report for 2002:

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“Politics matter for human development. Reducing poverty depends as much on whether poor people have political power as on their opportunities for economic progress. Democracy has proven to be the system of governance most capable of mediating and preventing conflict and of securing and sustaining well-being. By expanding people's choices about how and by whom they are governed, and bringing democracy requires principles of participation and accountability to the process of human development.⁴”

In Latin America, the work of the people of PAHO, and especially during the time of Abraham Horwitz much was accomplished in disease reduction. The more recent years there has been a greater focus on the political and social infrastructure. For so long, what was forgotten, was the great sense of community, and independence, great competence, with skills of government and science that preceded much in the Western world. What the West forgot, were its own Judeo-Christian origins, where relationships, caring and communities were the hallmarks of the early writings. If these two traditions had meshed, the tumultuous history of Latin America would have been different. Community could have been the core value of society.

As the history of Latin America unfolded, a vast separation occurred, of conquerors and conquered, with great benefits going one way. Whether it was gold, or current profit there was an outflow from communities increasingly fragmented - leaving behind many so-called “superfluous people.” Dictatorships of all kinds flourished, and the gap between rich and poor got bigger. Leadership came from the “haves.” Corruption became widespread. The poor end up in the rural areas, migrating to the favellas in the cities, which continue to grow, almost unfettered.

A “sense of community” was missing. Whether it was the native value, or those of the original Catholic traditions, it became a fragmented separate world, rather than one concerned with community, where greed became dominant, and the poor left to fend for themselves.

What we now see are the innumerable children on the streets, the shortened life, of an illness span, the lack of health services, and education in many places. Poverty pervades, and hope is gone. When even a spark of hope is still a present, people

strike out. They reach for new sources of strength through violence, guns, and drugs. And, yet they try mightily to find a better life. When hope dies, people become apathetic. We, also see WHO reports of 800,000,000 depressed people worldwide. None of this has been helped by the economic market economies of my country, and those of the IMF and World Bank⁵.

We must turn to “health promotion,” and not just treatment. In the Ottawa Charter, in which all the America’s participated, there were these words:

“Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual, or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is, therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy lifestyles to well-being.”⁶

The essence of this belief is community. To get there we need a new paradigm of health. What is the paradigm?

1. A broad definition of health
2. A broad definition of community
3. A shared vision based on community values
4. Improved quality of life for everyone
5. Diverse citizen participation and widespread community ownership
6. Focus on “systems change”
7. Development of local assets and resources
8. Benchmarks and measures of progress and outcome

The elements of a Healthy City/Community include:

1. A sense of history shared by citizens upon which its commonly held values are based.
2. Multi-dimensionality and a complex interactive economy

3. A striving for decentralization of power and citizen participation in making decisions about policy
4. Representation that focuses on the whole of a city or community and can visualize both “parts” and “wholes” simultaneously
5. The ability to adapt to change, cope with the breakdown, repair themselves, and learn both from their own experience and that of other cities and communities
6. The support and maintenance of infrastructures

There are common values connecting comprehensive and inter-sectoral initiatives that have been instituted in other related areas of concern including environment, sustainability, transportation, safety, education, anti-drug programs, urban planning, among many others. What is common in all of these efforts is the active participation of multiple community groups, institutions, and citizens crossing boundaries, to resolve conflicts and to create and carry out plans. In the process, beyond focusing on solutions, there is an awareness of reciprocity - what was called reciprocal maintenance in the Ottawa Charter - and trust in others to facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. There is a need to build and create both personal and social capital. Social capital has been defined as “features of social organization, such as civic participation, norms of finding solutions to community issues.”

To build social capital requires “Social Entrepreneurs⁷” who with all the skill of business entrepreneurs can organize, manage, teach and lead, social programs. Interestingly, most of the “Social Entrepreneurs” worldwide are women. Could it be they understand complex systems, better than their male counterparts?

What the Healthy Municipality movement has found, is that any one of the following issues, can be the focal point, of organizing, and building social capital: Urbanization and environment, disasters⁸, economics, the building of capital⁹, corruption and collaboration, food and nutrition, health promotion, Health Care System reform, sustainable environments, and especially the problems of youth.

It is here that I want to bring in another of my preoccupations, mentoring youth and creating leadership for the future. In my work with a 72 year old camp - Rising Sun¹⁰, we have brought 13-16 year old boys and girls, from throughout the world - many from Latin America - who probably would not make it without this

boost, and then mentoring them for life. We see many entering key leadership throughout the world. What better activity for PAHO than planning for the future through youth.

Through the ThreeFold Way¹¹ of environmental awareness, community participation, concern for human rights, and, equity, these communities are the beginning of a profound transition. PAHO has played a key role in facilitating discussion of these issues, and we as a species have a moral, economic and ecological responsibility actively to ensure the continuation of the process into the next century.

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ENDNOTES

1. Much of this material is from work with students at the School of Public Health at Berkeley. Their reports include "The ThreeFold Way" - and attempt to look at PAHO's future; and from.

2. From a review by Dan Blatt, editor of Futurecasts,, August 2002, The Mystery of Capital, Hernando de Soto. <http://www.futurecasts.com/book%20review%2026.htm>,

"Capital is the force that raises the productivity of labor and creates the wealth of nations. It is the lifeblood of the capitalist system, the foundation of progress, and the one thing that the poor countries of the world cannot seem to produce for themselves, no matter how eagerly their people engage in all the other activities that characterize a capitalist economy."

3. When introduced recently by Philip Lee, MD, the former assistant Secretary for Health in HEW and HHS, he said, "When Len told me about these ideas forty years ago, I told him they were irrelevant. Now, it's the only way to go!"

4. UNDP- Development Report, 2002.

5. From a review by Dan Blatt, editor of Futurecasts,, August 2002, The Mystery of Capital, Hernando de Soto. <http://www.futurecasts.com/book%20review%2026.htm>,

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6. OTTAWA CHARTER FOR HEALTH PROMOTION: First International Conference on Health Promotion, Ottawa, 21 November 1986

7. Duhl, Leonard, The Social Entrepreneurship of Change, Cogent Press, Putnam Valley, 2000.

8. "ComplexCity" - to understand multi-sectoral collaboration by looking at response to disaster

9. op cite, De Soto notes that many Latin American nations have tried capitalism on four separate occasions during the last two centuries and failed all four times. Numerous market weaknesses and/or lack of budgetary and/or monetary discipline played major roles in all of these failures. The degree of defectiveness is highlighted by the fact that perfection is not required for prosperity - and is far from achieved even in the advanced nations..

10. see www.risingsun.org

11. Two reports by the students of the School of Public Health at Berkeley: The ThreeFold Way,, and Complex-City: Health/Municipalities/Mutual Gains, reports to PAHO19999, 2000.