The Moral Determinants of Health

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Disclosures

• Dr. Berwick has no conflicts of interest to disclose.
The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) has only 15 genes, compared with 30,000 in the human genome. But it is a stern teacher, indeed. Answers to the questions it has raised may reshape both health care and society as a whole.

No one can say with certainty what the consequences of this pandemic will be in 6 months, let alone 6 years or 60. Some “new normal” may emerge, in which novel systems and assumptions will replace many others long taken for granted. But at this early stage, it is more honest to frame the new, post-COVID-19 normal not as predictions, but as a series of choices. Specifically, the pandemic nominates at least 6 properties of care for durable change: tempo, standards, working conditions, proximity, preparedness, and equity.
Choices for “The New Normal”

- Speed of Learning and Change
- Standardization and Commitment to Science
- Virtual Care and Reconsidering “Proximity”
- Protecting the Workforce
- Preparedness
- Inequity
“Inequities in power, money, and resources give rise to inequities in the conditions of daily life, which in turn lead to inequities in health.”

- Sir Michael Marmot
“More than 800,000 healthcare workers and almost 1.1 million of their children live in poverty across the US, according to a 2019 study published in the American Journal of Public Health. The researchers found that roughly 18.5 million people are employed in the US health industry. And nearly 10% of them — 1.7 million — earn so little that they get healthcare through Medicaid. Another 1.4 million have no health insurance at all.”
The Social Determinants of Health

1. Early Childhood Experiences
2. Education
3. Work and the Workplace
4. Experiences of Elders
5. Community Resilience
6. Fairness
Life Expectancy and the London Tube

Life Expectancy
Δ 21 years

Loss of Life:
8.4 Months/Minute
2.6 Years/Mile

Life Expectancy
Δ 21 years
Life Span and Life Circumstances

Life Expectancy
Δ 10 years

Loss of Life:
6 Months/Minute
2.3 Years/Mile
“6 months for every minute on the subway; 3.2 years for every mile travelled.”
The effects of statins on average survival....
“Death was postponed between -5 and 19 days in primary prevention trials and between -10 and 27 days in secondary prevention trials.”
US Life Expectancy by Year of Birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>Life expectancy at age 50</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Year of birth

- Richest 10%
- Middle 50%
- Poorest 10%
US Life Expectancy by Year of Birth

WOMEN
Life expectancy at age 50

Richest 10%

Middle 50%

Poorest 10%

Year of birth

1920 1930 1940 1950

70 80 85 90
20 Days of Your Lifespan Equals:

Taking Statins for 20 Years

Riding the D Train for 7 Seconds

Riding the Glasgow Bus for 43 Feet

Image Source: AARP, B.C. Lorio via Flickr, Raymond Okonski via geograph.org/uk
A Campaign for Moral Determinants of Health

2. Make health care unequivocally a human right in our nation.
3. Restore American leadership to reverse climate change.
4. Achieve radical reform of our nation’s criminal justice system.
5. End policies of exclusion and achieve compassionate immigration reform.
6. End hunger and homelessness in our nation.
7. Restore order, dignity, and equity to our democratic institutions, and assure the right of every single person’s vote to count equally.
How to Interrogate Health Care “Reform”

- Universal Coverage
- Improving Quality
- Improving Social Determinants of Health
- Reducing per Capita Costs

All now in the context of...
- COVID-19 and Future 21st Century Threats
- George Floyd, Structural Racism, and Mobilization
Thank you!