Power, Politics and Population Health: The Strength of Collaboration

Rudolf Virchow, the father of public health, as far back as the late nineteenth century said, “Medicine is a social science, and politics nothing else but medicine on a large scale.”

His point is well taken. Articles in this issue of MEDICC Review explore the often turbulent relationship between science and those with the power to use it. Eventually, it is they who can wield science for their benefit alone or to improve population and planetary health. They can pay attention to science, they can ignore science, or, in the worst cases, they can bend it to serve their own narrow interests.

As illustrated in several articles, breaking the decision-making monopoly of powerful forces requires that scientists and their allies come together to demand their place at the table. Of course, first must come the opportunity for scientists themselves to collaborate, to reach conclusions based on open, transparent and rigorous debate. This is driven home by Luis Velázquez-Pérez, President of the Cuban Academy of Sciences. Through his article, Cuban scientists call for a global scientific meeting to review the case of Havana-posted US diplomats’ health complaints. Complementing his piece is an interview with Mitchell Valdés, director of the Cuban Neuroscience Center, who emphasizes the critical importance of information sharing as part of proper scientific process for investigating this or any other medical mystery.

In Blanco’s paper on skyrocketing cancer drug prices worldwide, he and colleagues urge collaboration beyond the scientific community to establish a multinational force involving, first and foremost, the less-developed countries, to confront the major economic research to marshall the political will for change—perhaps there is no better illustration of the ability of collaboration in health and science to break through barriers than the joint venture between Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center and Cuba’s Molecular Immunology Center. This represents an important step to making Cuba’s cancer-fighting biotech therapies available to US patients, given the encouraging early results (released in September) of early-phase clinical trials of CIMAvax-EGF in US lung cancer patients.\[1\]

Another outstanding woman scholar and practitioner who would certainly have been included in the women-in-STEM series, but for her untimely death a year ago September, was renowned educator Emelia Ycart Pereira, a longtime member of MEDICC Review’s editorial board. Dr Ycart dedicated her five-decade career to improving the lives of people with disabilities, among her many activities, directing Havana’s La Castellana Psychopedagogical Center. We dedicate this issue to her memory.

The Editors