



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Health: Essential to a Flourishing Life

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"The greatest wealth is health." - Virgil

EXPERIENCE

For 50 years I have worked in a variety of settings as a nurse—caregiver, researcher, educator, and administrator. My experience in the American health care delivery system is extensive and intensive; my experience in less economically developed areas/countries is limited and provocative. Nevertheless, all experiences in the laying of soapy hands have shaped my beliefs about health.

The topic of this essay is health. However, it is my considered opinion that the Winter 2013 *Resolutions to Action*, "The Right to Water," was also about health. Major indicators of health, including under-five mortality and overall life expectancy, are more influenced by adequate nutrition and sufficient, clean water than they are by drugs and what we typically think of as "health care." In developed countries we take the basics for granted unless something goes wrong with the supporting infrastructure. In developing countries ensuring clean water and adequate nutrition are the

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Whether one takes a broad or narrow view, health is an essential element of a

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flourishing life. It was not by arbitrary selection that three of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are specific to health issues:

- Reducing child mortality rates;
- Improving maternal health;
- Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.

The argument could be made that the other five MDGs also have significant impact on the health status of individuals and of communities:

- Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger;

- Achieving universal primary education;
- Promoting gender equality and empowering women;
- Ensuring environmental sustainability;
- Developing a global partnership for development.

Health is often considered to be the absence of disease but that is an insufficient description. Health addresses physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of the person as well as the presence of a social support system that facilitates health. Concepts of harmony and balance are pertinent to health and from that perspective people with significant

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defects or disabilities may indeed be “healthy.”

The preamble of the World Health Organization constitution noted some fundamental concepts about health that are too often forgotten.

- Health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace.
- Achievement of any political or geographical unit in promoting and protecting the health of its citizens is of value to the entire global community.
- A government has a responsibility for the health of its people.

Hubert Humphrey said it well. “The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.”

Since harmful viruses, bacteria, and violent mind-sets do not recognize national boundaries, the health of any land is a concern of every land. Health dispari-

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ties based on ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic status are as unacceptable as any other form of discrimination.

Nevertheless, just as charity begins at home so does health. Prudent attentiveness to one’s own physical, mental, and spiritual health is a given in a faith tradition that says we are created in the image of God.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

- Malnutrition is the basic cause of an estimated 35% of world-wide deaths among children under the age of five.

- The overall rate of progress in decreasing deaths of children under five is close to that required to meet the Millennium Development Goals, however, progress is unevenly distributed. The Americas and Europe are doing well but progress is very slow in other areas, particularly in the African area where over half of child deaths occur.
- There is a negative correlation between education and disease burden.
- Health flourishes at the intersection of medical science, social science, culture, and common sense.
- Organizational focus, political effort, and community activism have succeeded in establishing access to safe drinking water for 89 percent of the world’s population.
- Much progress has been made in eliminating and controlling communicable disease because the will to do so has been there.
- Noncommunicable diseases account for 63 percent of the deaths in today’s world. Many of these diseases are the result of life-style choices.
- In the United States 36 percent of adults and 18 percent of pre-school age children are obese.

REFLECTION

Availability of the means of health promotion must become a fact of life. Access to health care must be recognized as a human right. There are sufficient resources to provide a basic level of health promotion and health care for all people. Well over \$2 trillion is spent on health care annually in the United States but our health status is below that of countries which spend far less per capita. What is lacking is the will to use resources differently.

Even among those who differ greatly on how to organize health promotion and health care delivery, there is a growing consensus about what will lead to improvement of overall health status, namely:

- Improvement of health literacy;
- Effective use of services;
- Minimization of administrative expenses;
- Favoring care that is most beneficial (evidence based)
- Establishing a continuum of care that is coordinated and integrated and includes palliative and end-of-life care.

We need to examine our assumptions, our expectations, and our way of doing

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business so we can expand rather than limit the capacity for designing policy that is in the best interest of individual patients and does the most to promote the common good.

ACTION

1. Be attentive to what Schweitzer called the “doctor inside.” Eat, rest, play, and pray well.
2. Educate oneself and others about the provisions of the Affordable Care Act. Let not hysteria and vested interests hold sway in the public square.
3. Raise one’s own and others’ consciousness of the impact global policies have on food production and clean water availability around the world.
4. Question rather than passively accept rising health care costs in the United States.
5. Champion at all levels fair distribution of health care resources nationally and internationally.
6. Work to decrease violence, a major contributor to premature death and ill health.