

Planetary Health: Report on the 7th Annual Global Health Conference

With insightful logic and inspiring rhetoric, *Lancet* editor-in-chief Richard Horton, FRCP, FRCPC, FMedSci, warned the Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) conference attendees that an exclusive focus on improving health will fail. He argued instead for 'planetary health.' "We have to cross outside of health and think about the relationship between health and other dimensions being defined as sustainability," Horton said in a keynote address at the annual CUGH conference in San Francisco April 9-11, 2016. The conference attracted more than 1,800 participants from around the world.

At a panel on progress against the HIV epidemic, Anthony Fauci, MD, Director, Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) charted a cautiously optimistic course forward for confronting the HIV/AIDS epidemic. "I'm talking about turning around the trajectory. We are headed towards ending the pandemic as we know it." On the panel were some of the most influential voices in the epidemic: Fauci, Peter Piot, DTM, FRCP, FMedSci, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (and formerly with WHO); Eric Goosby, MD, UCSF School of Medicine (formerly USA Ambassador at Large and Global AIDS Coordinator); and Diane Havlir, UCSF School of Medicine.

The conference had a distinct interdisciplinary focus, with topics ranging from Zika to seasonal hunger (hunger before the crops are harvested), corruption, urban health, financing the sustainable development goals,

violence, cancer prevention, refugees, soft diplomacy, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and multiple topics in between. A panel on technology (which included Manu Prakash, genius inventor of the folding paper microscope) revealed lasers that can detect contaminants in food, hand-held X-ray machines, Bluetooth stethoscopes and a low-cost water treatment called Zimba. The conference was supplemented by a large selection of posters on each day. The following quotes illustrate the depth and innovation of the topics:

"NCDs represent 53% of death and disability in LMICs and 1.6% of global aid"

Chris Murray, MD, PhD, Director, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, HME, University of Washington.

"Six percent of the human population lives in mega cities" The majority of population growth over the next 3 decades will occur in megacities.

David Vlahov, RN, PhD, FAAN, Dean, School of Nursing, UCSF

"It is quite normal to treat pandemics and epidemics as health issues, but we know they also have deep societal impact and enormous economic consequences."

Maria Freire, PhD, President, Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH)

"Corruption is a social determinant of health"

Jillian Kohler, PhD, University of Toronto, WHO Collaborating Center for Governance Accountability and Transparency in the Pharmaceutical Sector

Preparing students for the real real-world and emerging themes in global health education were the topics of one of the preconference sessions. The next trends identified by panelists for public health educators to consider include:¹

- A focus on Africa (44%), Middle East (21%), Asia (12%)
- 3 foci – agriculture and food security, conflict, climate
- Language – Arabic
- Work – the need for short-term expertise, while nationals provide long-term management

Skill sets that employers expect students to learn in graduate school were discussed in-depth by both panels. Overwhelmingly the panelists emphasized the importance of soft skills (participatory competence, inter-professional, business savvy to run programs, language skills.) They also emphasized that in-depth expertise in a specific area or skill is the best way to assure employment. It was noted that 78% of employers need a balance of people with technical skills.

Mark your calendars! The 2017 CUGH conference will be held in DC April 7-9. It will be co-hosted by Johns Hopkins and Makerere Universities.

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REFERENCES

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