

The Ashgate Companion to the Globalization of Health

Ted Schrecker (Ed)

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The publishers of this work, one in a series dealing with contemporary policy and historical developments, commission these works from 'respected and experienced experts' with the aim of offering 'scholars and graduate students a comprehensive and authoritative state-of-the-art review of current research in a particular area'.

While claims of comprehensiveness might be considered somewhat presumptuous in a vast field such as the globalisation of health, this volume succeeds in fulfilling the publisher's aims. An array of researchers, notable for their contributions to the field, has produced a work that can be read in its entirety or used as a 'companion' reference for particular topics.

This eclectic work ably demonstrates the need for a trans-disciplinary approach to globalisation and health. Various chapters draw on a range of disciplines including history, anthropology, life sciences and political science to embrace topics of vital concern to the problems of dealing with disease and promoting health in a world in which the movement of humans, goods, services, technology and financial capital have been intensified at an unprecedented rate.

The reader is introduced to the importance of understanding globalisation and health in a historical context and recognising the anthropological dimensions of the phenomenon. While the dangers of communicable diseases, which have dominated the international relations of health, are amply dealt with, the pressing problems of non-communicable diseases are rightly acknowledged and the politics of policy in this field are presented.

Among the global health policy challenges considered are global climate change, the disease consequences of international trade and the provision of medicines to the world's population. The ways in which global health are perceived as part of human security are addressed and confronting questions concerned with who decides policy, who lives and who dies are asked. Events in Haiti provide a vehicle for thoughtful theoretical consideration of various dimensions of the earthquake, its consequences and the organisation of relief measures.

One of the greatest changes in the way in which humans live – urbanisation – is examined in a chapter devoted to the problems, such as slums and violence, of metropolitan health in a globalised world. The development of the concept of global governance of health is chronicled in a further chapter, which identifies how such governance is changing and explains the increasingly complex linkages between health and foreign policy, historically the preserve of the nation state. The growing role of non-state actors and the need for the World Health Organization, a creature of nation states, to adapt to this reality is highlighted.

A chapter dealing with foreign aid argues that 'poverty reduction' does not constitute development, and criticises International Monetary Fund policies for damaging health systems calls on health advocates to look beyond the confines of the health sector to become advocates for a new development model concerned with wider economic advancement. Social determinants of health are the subject of a chapter asserting that they are central to understanding the roots of health inequities and canvassing, what the authors term, the prospects and uncertainties of an agenda based on social determinants of health.

The final chapter of the book is devoted to the vital concern of human rights in any approach to global health. The notion of a 'right to health' is explored and the weak responses of nation states to ensuring such a right is described. An argument for the benefits of a human rights approach to health is also presented.

Some content of this work has been previously published elsewhere. Nevertheless, the Research Companion is a valuable contribution to the literature and is an authoritative reference for researchers and students of one of the great contemporary phenomena of the age: the globalisation of health.

Simon Barraclough

*School of Public Health and Human Biosciences
La Trobe University
Melbourne*