

Young voices in research for health 2007

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The young voices in research for health essay competition was first held in 2006. The competition has been jointly sponsored by the Global Forum for Health Research and The Lancet. This book is a compilation of winning essays from the competition held in 2007. The competition was open to young (under 30) professionals interested in or working on the broad spectrum of research for health. The theme for the 2007 competition was 'Equitable access: research challenges for health in developing countries'.

In 2007, the total number of entries was 289 and entries were received from 60 countries. The largest number of entries was from Africa and 45% of the entries were from low-income countries. The five winners were from Nigeria, Brazil, Canada, Malaysia and China. The book contains these essays along with 35 others. The book starts with an introduction to the 10/90 gap. In 1990, only about 5% of the world's health research resources were applied to the health problems of developing countries where 93% of the preventable mortality occurred. Even today less than 10% of the resources are devoted to the health problems of 90% of the world's population. The Global Forum for Health Research focuses on redressing this imbalance.

The author of the award winning essay Seye Abimbola talks about patents and patients. Being a clinical pharmacologist this is an issue about which I am especially concerned. The author talks about Belding Scribner who invented the shunt which made repeated hemodialysis possible. He did not patent his invention but made it available free to humanity. Patents are partly responsible for the situation that millions of people in developing countries are denied access to much needed medicines. The problem of access to newer antiretrovirals is becoming especially acute. The author talks about alternatives to patents which would allow

innovation to thrive and would at the same time ensure access to new inventions and discoveries.

The author of the second essay in the book, Alisha Apale talks about the gap between research and practice. The author talks about her experience in the Thai-Burma border where non-status refugees are housed. The children are suffering from dengue fever and there is no medicine, no doctor and no money. In Gir Forest, India she is challenged by an angry crowd who says that people like her come to them asking questions. They tell them everything but nothing in their life changes. Researching health problems is OK but if the participants do not get any benefit then it is a sad state of affairs.

Denise Pimenta of Brazil, another award winner poses the question 'Can the 'North' learn from developing countries: Question or affirmation?' The author focuses on information flow and the ease of access of information by health researchers in developing countries. Three characteristics of information are the individual is often blamed for not acting on the provided information due to various factors. There is a distinct preference for the opinion of 'experts' over those of lay men. The flow of information is 'one way' from the provider to the recipient, from the north to the south. The author argues for a two way transfer of information, in essence a dialogue.

Food security is becoming a major issue the world over. Food prices on an average have risen by more than 20% over the last year. Laura Sikstrom from Canada addresses evidence-based research in food security interventions in her essay. The author talks about the 'hungry' season in Malawi when most families live on one meal a day. The local causes of diminished food security are very apparent while