

Planetary Pediatrics



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IN AN EXTRAORDINARY 2018 George Armstrong lecture, Susan Bennett, MB, ChB, plotted the course of human development from our discovery of self-identity to that of our identity as planetary citizens. She transported the audience across the universe to enlighten our understanding of who we must become in the future as pediatricians to sustain our relevance to the needs of children. With a subtlety that defied cognition, she forced us to decide our intention—whether or not to travel the journey to Planetary Pediatrics.

Dr. Bennett guided us on this journey along a path paved with the principles of child rights, social justice, and equity. The genius of the lecture was her capacity to synthesize the medical, developmental, climate, and planetary sciences; principles of human rights, social justice, equity, and ethics; and the elements of spirituality necessary to establish the foundation and framework for our work as Planetary Pediatricians and child advocates.

The path to Planetary Pediatrics is not a leap into the future but rather the continued evolution of the discipline of pediatrics. Over the past 7 decades, this evolution has transported us across the boundaries of general, psychosocial, community, social, societal, international, and global health to the threshold of Planetary Pediatrics. Advances in social epidemiology have led to our understanding of the impact of social and environmental determinants on child health and that of the adults they will become. Advances in the life course sciences provide the biology and physiology to explain the impact of these determinants on children's well-being, as well as the disparities and inequities thereof.

To continue this evolution to Planetary Pediatrics, under- and postgraduate pediatric education must be grounded in social epidemiology and the life course sciences. War, poverty, migration, genocide, human trafficking, and other global challenges have moved us beyond “community” and “international” health to the practice of global pediatrics. Today, globalization and climate change are moving us beyond global pediatrics to the brink of Planetary Pediatrics, where these and other planetary challenges to child health and well-being will be addressed. How can we prepare ourselves as academic faculty, and what innovations in curricula and

pedagogy will be required to support these evolutionary changes?

The transdisciplinary practice of Planetary Pediatrics will increasingly require linkage of pediatricians and national pediatric societies to multidisciplinary global organizations engaged in the response to critical issues impacting children worldwide. The global knowledge and experience gained by these public, private, and academic sector organizations and institutions must be fully integrated into faculty development and training curricula with retooled pedagogical stratagems. Students, residents, fellows, and faculty must be fully engaged with these entities to ensure that global knowledge and experience are translated into pediatric practice—locally and globally.

As violations of children's rights and social injustice are a primary source of global inequities in child health, an approach to pediatric practice based on child rights will be required to sustain the relevance of pediatrics to child well-being. This approach to child health requires the vertical integration of clinical practice, systems development, and the generation of policy. Faculty education in the principles, standards, and norms of child rights, social justice, and health equity across this spectrum of practice will be necessary to prepare pediatricians for the practice of Planetary Pediatrics. Validation of these competencies through requirements for board certification in pediatrics will help to ensure their integration into medical education curricula and training.

In her presentation, Dr. Bennett chronicled the passion, commitment, and self-sacrifice of colleagues in the past who can serve as mentors for us all. She related the history of George Armstrong, who opened the first hospital in the world for sick and poor children in 1769. She then spoke about the life and sacrifice of Janus Korczak, a Polish pediatrician who died at the hands of the Nazis while protecting the orphans for whom he cared. His oft-quoted statement that it is “inadmissible to leave the world as one finds it,” resonates globally as a constant alarm and challenge to child advocates.

Our pediatric training curricula are starkly void of this history or attribution to the genius and passion of these and countless other individuals who have and continue to shape our discipline. It is critically important

that physicians, and young physicians in particular, have role models for what individual pediatricians can achieve locally, nationally, and globally in service to children—in clinical care, systems development, education, research, and advocacy. Dr. Bennett's presentation introduced us to a few such individuals as examples of how to transform our passion for child health and well-being into practice.

Inspired by the courage of Dr. Korczak and his commitment to the rights of children, Poland—nearly 40 years after his death—led the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The relationship between rights and health were perhaps best expressed by Jonathan Mann, MD, through his work and writings in response to the global human immunodeficiency virus epidemic: “We need to see how and to what extent realiz-

ing human rights and increasing respect for dignity can operate to diminish the societal contribution to disease, disability and death.” It is incumbent on American pediatricians and organized pediatrics to work exhaustively to ensure US ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as we are the only country in the world that has failed to do so.

Ultimately, Dr. Bennett left us no choice as to our decision to pursue this journey. Her iconic visuals of planet Earth from within the confines of its gravitational pull contrasted with that of Earth from deep space, providing a stark reality of who and what we represent in the universe. If we are to thrive as humanity, it is up to us to continue the transformation of our discipline into the practice of Planetary Pediatrics to ensure the health and well-being of future generations.