FOR NEW PARADIGMS IN THE HEALTH FIELD: THEORETICAL CONCERNS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Dr. Jaime Llambias-Wolff
jlwolff@yorku.ca

What is a Paradigm?

- Conceptual or methodological model underlying the theories and practices of a science or discipline at a particular time.

The Problem

- The health care system worldwide is facing a critical crisis
- Neither the boom of a sophisticated private medical sector, nor a deteriorated public health care system can respond effectively to these critical challenges
- Need to search for new paradigms in the health field
The Crisis
- Cost of care is skyrocketing
- High financial impact of chronic diseases
- Over consumption of drugs and unaffordable technology
- Fiscal crisis in the public and welfare state systems
- Great inequities and disparities in market private systems
- Demographic and epidemiological transitions suggest this trend is only going to worsen

Theoretical Concerns and Practical Implications
- Reforms rarely questioned the dominance of the biomedical model underpinning the present health care system
- Emphasis on cure and its dependence on costly hospital infrastructure, high technology and pharmaceuticals

Theoretical Concerns and Practical Implications
- Approaches to the health crisis have largely been concerned with questions implementation, managerial reforms and financial measures to contain or divert costs
Paradigm Shift

- Old paradigm (Instrumental):
  - Medical model in which you recognize and separate the problem in parts and use an instrumental approach
  - One identifies the problem and fixes it

Paradigm Shift

- New paradigm (Relational):
  - Not to change a person’s pattern but to use it as information in order to help them
  - From treating symptoms to searching for patterns
  - Shift from viewing disease as a negative view to viewing it as a source of information
  - From disease as an entity to seeing as a process

The Search for New Paradigms in the Health Field

- To analyze main alternatives for paradigm shifts enabling critiques to be bridged in areas such as:

  1) Epistemological and Ontological Issues: (Biomedical model, the social construction of diseases, pluralist and trans-disciplinary approaches, need for paradigm shift)
To analyze main alternatives for paradigm shifts enabling critiques to be bridged in areas such as:

2) Ethical Concerns: (Humanization of health, social dimension of diseases, entrepreneurial culture of health, goals of biomedicine, ethics and medical practice, life and death)

3) Power Relations and the Political Economy: (Social authority and jurisdiction, ideological forms of medical knowledge, medical industrial complex, medical consumerism, empowerment)

4) Science and Knowledge: (Alternative options to the effectiveness and limitations of modern medicine, understanding ‘medical’ and ‘health’ as not purely scientific issues, scientific definitions and standards)

5) Global Pluralism and Practical Alternatives: (Holistic worldview, cultural synergies between East and West worldviews, non biomedical approaches, defining success for alternatives, understanding ‘medical’ and ‘health’ as not purely scientific issues)

Contentious Issues and Questions for Further Inquiry:
Some Relevant Examples
1) Epistemological and Ontological Issues

1. a Contentious Issues
   - The limitations of the biomedical model for facing the health crisis
   - The transdisciplinarity and complexity of health paradigms
   - The need for a paradigm shift in order to gain a more collective perspective of current health issues
   - The emergence of a new paradigm that is universal and addresses issues of financing, organization and macro management
   - The development and use of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinarity practice into biomedicine

1. b Questions for Further Inquiry
   - What drives the creation of new principles and ideologies?
   - How can psychological and behaviour dimensions of illness be incorporated into a new or revised model?
   - Can nature serve as a persuasive link between health and wellness, and alternative methods?
   - How deeply rooted is the dominant health paradigm and are the related implications irreversible or can another paradigm contain better answers?
1. b Continued

- Is it possible for other value systems to co-exist with scientific biomedical standards or are these ideals too closely in cahoots with societal ideas of legitimacy?

- How can alternative methods to humanize health and disease be reconstructed into biomedicine or do we need a different paradigm all together that only includes a mere reconstruction of biomedicine?

- Is the pluralistic or inter-/transdisciplinary approach the direction for an emerging paradigm in public and collective health?

1. b Continued

- If inter- and transdisciplinary medicine is currently being introduced into the world of biomedicine, how must it be implemented to be successful?

- How can we raise awareness of what is required for sustainability and interdisciplinary thinking?

- How can such concepts of interdisciplinary ways of thinking (and consequent health) be instated into existing schools of thought?

2) Ethical Concerns

Ethics

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2. a Contentious Issues

- There is a need for the humanization of health and related health practices by becoming “more sensitive, critical and responsive”
- Ethics and the importance of the “social dimension of health” (re: social science contributions to public health)
- The emergence of a new “entrepreneurial culture”
- Doctors struggle to combine paradigms and technological advances without dismissing ethics

2. b Questions for Further Inquiry

- How can ethical and social justice aspects of health be integrated into the existing and strict confines of the biomedical/promotional model for health?
- Are doctors and other health professionals too closely tied to the prestige of their professions to truly allow for advances in health policy that benefit the user?

2. b Continued

- Will ethics and professional values take a back seat to the corporate biomedical advances of science and technology in the future?
- Is the entrepreneurial style of health beneficial to the consumer? That said, has health generally become a commodity or is there still hope for an emergence of socially aware health care?
3) Power Relations and the Political Economy

3. a Contentious Issues

- The industrialization and commodification of health care
- Current struggles between public and private sectors on which one is more productive
- More active and involved citizens and patients
- The role of social movements
- The need for a negotiated consensus among key stakeholders in order to promote changes

3. b Questions for Further Inquiry

- What does the concept of “empowerment” entail and how would people benefit from this beyond the current theoretical assumptions?

- How much power do Health Social Movements (HSMs), Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), etc. hold with respect to their influence on the shaping of public health policy?

- Is it possible to steer away from the effects of globalization and industrialization with respect to health care systems?
3. b Continued

- How can people be sustainably involved in the decision making process for the health policies and programs that affect them?

- How can negotiated consensus be achieved with such diversified populations, limited resources, etc.?

- Is it possible to change the conceptions of those who are large stakeholders and thus benefit from biomedicine’s dominance?

4) Science and Knowledge

4. a Contentious Issues

- The objectivity of scientific fact versus the apparently subjective alternative methods

- The importance of expanding current research perspectives outside of paradigms and towards a more interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary fashion

- The need to come to a place where scientific standards are not the be-all, end-all of medical problems
4. a Continued

• A demand for and an increased prevalence of practitioners trained in both biomedicine and alternative methods (suggesting open-mindedness and integration)

• The astounding differences in funding between biomedical research and public health research

• Public policies support health industries (pharmaceuticals, biotech., medical tech.) and corporations

4. b Questions for Further Inquiry

• What means of measurement or research can be developed such that more subjective methods be given the same validity as those considered more objective and based on scientific fact?

• How successful has the physical therapy field been in incorporating the lived experience of the patients into the pre-existing biomedical paradigm?

4. b Continued

• Are alternative methods backed up by enough evidence or value to truly overtake biomedicine as a paradigm?

• Is the trend of training such “open-minded” practitioners effective across the board or is there resistance in some areas? If so, who is resisting and why?
5) Global Pluralism and Practical Alternatives

5. a Contentious Issues
- The increased integration of alternative methods within the biomedical framework
- Widening the definition of success of alternatives practices with respect to therapeutic methods
- The growing importance of the relationship between humans and their surrounding environment
- The emergence of a more holistic worldview on health that encompasses the environment, biology, psychology, social science, etc.

5. b Questions for Further Inquiry
- How effective have alternative methods and representatives of alternative health been in introducing new concepts and approaches?
- Why are some people skeptical of alternative practices and what needs to be done for informing the public of the available routes of health care?
5. b Continued

- Can these ideas be integrated or must they replace currently existing paradigms in order to be deemed a successful transition?

- What are the restrictions to alternative methods and their subsequent incorporation from within the world of biomedicine?

- Where is there evidence of this emerging paradigm within the world today and how can we learn from those examples?

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