

Chapter 5

Interdisciplinary Relationships Between Medicine and Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

The aim of medical science is treating and preventing diseases. The development of medical sciences has been influenced by developments taking place in other sciences including social sciences. Sciences including physical sciences, biological sciences or social sciences interact with each other. The interaction takes place between sciences in each category and between sciences from different categories. However, there are very few studies that deal specifically with the interaction of medicine with social sciences. As both have to work together because of the human complex nature as a result some authors considered medicine itself as a social science, thus creating an interdisciplinary environment that hosts both medicine and social sciences. This chapter reviews the complex interdisciplinarity between medicine and a number of social sciences, including anthropology, psychology, sociology, political sciences and economy.

INTRODUCTION

World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “not only the absence of disease, but the complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being” (Koch-Weser, 2009). Health involves various aspects of human life, as it is not only concerned with being free of diseases. Mental and social stability are important components of health. That is why medicine should interact with other sciences including social sciences in order to reach the goal of World Health Organization.

Medicine is a science that aims to provide health, which is so complex and not easily achievable as defined by WHO. The complexity stems from the fact that health has to interact with other social sciences designed to describe and study the human’s behavior. Some researchers consider medicine itself as a social science. According to Kottle (2011, p. 930) medicine is considered as “a Social Science in Its Very

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Bone and Marrow”. The interaction between medicine and social sciences is complex because it interacts with a number of social sciences like Sociology, psychology, economics, political science, history and anthropology. These sciences interact with each other producing complex interdisciplinary relations.

This complex interaction produces new disciplines that include a combination of social sciences and medicine. For example, the interaction between psychology and medicine has led to a new discipline called clinical psychology. Similarly, there is an interaction between medicine and anthropology resulting in medical anthropology. It follows therefore that there is unlimited interaction between social sciences and medicine, bringing about interdisciplinary new specialized branches.

In this chapter, the interdisciplinary interaction between medicine and social sciences including anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc. is discussed and examples of the complex relations between medicine and social sciences are presented.

BACKGROUND

A productive community cannot be healthy unless health services are provided while sustainably developed. Since the development and progress of civilization is associated with the development of various sciences, complex relations as a result are bound to exist between them.

Although developments taking place between medicine and social sciences have greatly increased over the last century, there is still room for further development and enhancement to evolve, around a number of basic medical sciences like anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology, embryology, etc. There is also a long waiting list for other clinical specialties to follow suit. This includes main specialties like medicine, surgery, orthopaedics, psychiatry, obstetrics, gynecology, neurology...etc. and other subspecialties.

It is generally agreed that progress in medical sciences is interrelated to developments in social sciences, because through social sciences, the needs of individual patients and community can only be identified (Kottle, 2011). In other words, inputs received from social sciences studies help in the development of medicine. Additionally, knowledge of epidemiology of diseases, genetic factors, and environmental factors is essential to understanding health problems in a community understanding the distribution and prevalence of diseases and for the services have to be delivered.

Providing a health service requires a knowledge of economy, epidemiology, politics and so on in order to optimize the use of resources which are not always abundantly available. Therefore, the interaction between medicine and social sciences is two faces for the same coin. Medicine, on the one hand, has its effects on social conditions that the social sciences are concerned of. Social conditions also have their effects on medicine on the other hand.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTH SECTOR

Health services require the information provided by various social sciences disciplines to give the best and appropriate care to the society. Prevalence and distribution of diseases in a specific community differ from other communities. Social sciences help in identifying the diseases that are prevalent in that particular community. More resources will be given to treat these diseases.

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