

Dr. Briggs Explains Some Long-Term Challenges in Global Public Health (10:01 minutes)

Time Stamp: 00:00:00

Dr. Deborah Briggs: I think one of the most relevant public health issues right now is, how do we alleviate poverty? I think that's probably one of the major issues. Because when you begin to alleviate poverty, people can afford vaccines. They can afford medicines. They can afford a better house, etc. They can afford to travel to go see a doctor. So if we can alleviate poverty, which is a huge issue, then I think we would come a long way in global health. Certainly, another issue that we're looking at is global warming. And what are we going to do about that? And when we look at global warming, and emerging diseases, and we look at as the temperature rises, then for example, mosquitoes carrying various viruses that can move into new areas are a concern, and I think those are really two major, big issues in in global public health.

Time Stamp: 00:00:56

Dr. Briggs: In looking into the future for where global public health is going, I think it's pretty difficult to determine what the next issues will be. We can just look at the HIV epidemic and how that really shook up the world and came as a total surprise. And we can look at the recent terrible nuclear disaster and tsunami in Japan. And what is that going to do for global public health in the future? And so I think it's really rather difficult to predict at this point what the future is going to be.

Time Stamp: 00:01:27

Dr. Briggs: You know, one of the things I've found in in my career is that scientists love to talk to each other about solutions and how we can move forward. But sometimes, we need to stop preaching to the choir, and we need to get out there and talk to people who are not as educated, who have different agendas, and they are just looking to where they're going to get their next meal. So we have to think about how we are going to educate the people who don't have the background that we have, who are living in areas that we really can't even fathom. So we have to look at how we can reach them using different methods of education. And what we've done at the Global Alliance is to actually work with people in-country, so that we know the customs; we know that they can produce the language; and we can actually engage people on a local level and give them the expertise, so it's like training the trainers, so that they can go and educate the people living in these areas. And some of the unique ways that they've come up to provide education is fantastic. For example, we had a poster that was developed, and it didn't have any words on it. But it explained how to prevent rabies. And that poster was in such demand that it went out to over 20 countries in Africa and over 15,000 people. And we had photographs coming back of people around the posters looking at what to do to prevent rabies. And I think that was really inspirational as well.

Time Stamp: 00:03:02

Dr. Briggs: The fact that global health is really not a mainstream of financial stability is a real issue. So how do we begin to think about where we get funding for various issues in in health? And certainly we can look at the Gates Foundation. They have given billions of dollars to support for example the EPI program to vaccinate children in countries that until the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation actually stepped in didn't have that opportunity. So we do have streams of financial input that are coming in. We know that the Millennium Development Goals have been developed by a number of institutions together to look at where they're going and how they can work together, and I think that's really important. And I think that the World Health Organization actually has some excellent programs, and they have various regional offices that maybe have an idea of what is going on. We know that various governments are very supportive, and they give financial remuneration to countries to help them with public health. So there are a number of streams coming in, but they can't do everything. Of course.

Time Stamp: 00:4:22

Dr. Briggs: There's a major difference between the global public health issues in a resource-poor country as compared to an industrialized country. We can see it in the United States. We just need to go down the street, and we see a number of obese people, for example. So in the United States, one of the major health issues is obesity. Another major issue is chronic diseases. All of us are required to be vaccinated for childhood diseases before we go to school, but when we go to a resource-poor country, this is not the

case. [There are] very few cases of obesity. We see lots of diseases that are vaccine-preventable. So there's a definite difference. We certainly see diseases that could be prevented but are not prevented because there [is] limited access to the drugs that are needed. So we come back to poverty, and the inability to travel to get the medicines. So I think there's a real difference between industrialized countries and resource-poor countries in that way.

Time Stamp: 00:5:28

Dr. Briggs: Regarding the environment and global public health, I think the number one public health concern we can look at is global warming and what is that doing to the environment. And in Africa and Asia, we see huge differences in the environment where crops that could have been grown are — they're too dry now, and the area is too dry now, and they can't grow those crops. So we're back to, how do we feed those people? And again, the nuclear and tsunami disaster in Japan brings home how fragile we are as nations when it comes to fighting Mother Nature, Mother Nature. We're just not going to be able to do it. So I think that Mother Nature can create natural disasters that would be environmentally terrible for countries and for public health.

Time Stamp: 00:06:21

Dr. Briggs: In my travels around the world, I've really learned a lot about global public health, and my specialty is rabies, so I'm going to sort of focus on that. When I started before I really began to do much traveling, I thought the answer to saving human lives was vaccinating the people. I thought if we vaccinate the people against rabies, we can save human lives. And then as I got traveling a little bit, and I saw that 99 percent of the deaths are caused by infected dogs, I came to the conclusion that if we could eliminate the source of the infection, eliminate rabies in dogs, we would save human lives. And when I looked at programs and saw what was going on, I started to step back a minute and think, This isn't going to work one way or the other. What we need is intersectoral approaches. We need to look at everything. Most importantly, we need to look at education. How do we educate people? Not just the people that are at risk, but how do we educate the international funding community? How do we educate governments to do something? How do we educate doctors who still might not know how to prevent rabies, and how do we educate parents to have responsible pet ownership? So I think that what I've learned is that there are no easy answers. There's no real magic bullet. And the tenets to preventing disease are pretty well known. But exactly how you institute those tenets can be different in one culture to another. And the way to get the message across is going to be different. But if we begin to work with communities, and if we begin to give them the tools, then I believe that everything is possible.

Time Stamp: 00:08:11

Dr. Briggs: Information for somebody working in public health is really important. How do you stay up to the latest information in what's happening? Where are the outbreaks? What are the possibilities, etc.? And there are many global organizations that are online, like ProMed, etc. You can go on the CDC website and get information. But I think one of the most important things for a student or an individual interested in a career in global public health is to go to international meetings, to publish, to read the data, to get involved, to find out who the experts are in their particular field, and to see how you can interact with them and with their students or with their colleagues to really get the latest information.

Time Stamp: 00:08:59

Dr. Briggs: The priorities for global public health are usually investigated by a group of international organizations. They come together. For example, the World Health Organization, certainly the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID, UNICEF, and a number of organizations like that that come together and determine, what are the greatest needs? And what they've done is to put together the Millennium Development Goals, which is available on the web. You can take a look at what they are. And they have specific goals that they are aiming at to achieve. And with priorities. I think that's really critical. I think that this is the only way that we can really move forward as a group to determine what is the best way to alleviate poverty. What is the best way to spend the money that we have? And I think that the Millennium Development Goals are an excellent example.