

### *The Third Brazilian Conference on Workers' Health*

The date marking the 20 years of groundbreaking experiences with workers' healthcare in the public health system and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brazilian Conference on Workers' Health (III CNST) to be held in November 2005 have inspired the publication of this special theme issue. Over the course of these 20 years we have observed a slow and intricate process with advances and relapses in the various forms of workers' healthcare. Historical issues involving hazardous working conditions still persist, added to which are new problems resulting from changes in the world of work in all sectors of the economy. Today, there is an increasing heterogeneity of working and living situations, where differences are more striking, competition is stiffer, and casualization of work relations is more intense. This multifaceted scenario of instability and insecurity at different levels and to different degrees sets the dominant tone for the majority of workers.

In the last 20 years, Brazil has witnessed a growing scientific output in specific graduate studies programs in Collective Health and other fields of knowledge. There has also been impressive intellectual production from the services sector responsible for implementing actions in the area of workers' health. Despite these advances in the field of knowledge, work as a reference and fundamental dimension of living conditions has still not been assumed in daily public health practice or prevention and health promotion policies.

This special theme issue was conceived to contribute to the broad debate in preparation for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brazilian Conference on Workers' Health. It combines three types of contributions: (a) analytical and critical texts, necessary for contextualizing the "state of the art". This first group of articles expresses general concerns with the dimension of health problems in major contingents of the working population and gaps in the incorporation of work issues by the Public Health/Collective Health field; (b) articles related to research on specific segments of workers, emphasizing some of the more vulnerable groups in contemporary Brazilian society, as a counterpart to the emphasis on traditional research prioritizing what are considered dynamic categories from the point of view of their power for social change; (c) the third group of articles expands the conventional theoretical framework and suggests new prospects for action.

It is hoped that this effort at convening key scholars from the field will spark the fundamental reflections and practices that we all pursue. The challenge is still the same as that identified in 1994 by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brazilian Conference on Workers' Health: to unify agencies with a view towards an effective inter-sector policy, with social participation. The fact that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference is being convened jointly by the Ministers of Health, Labor/Employment, and Social Security can represent the beginning of a search to overcome the resistance that has been blocking the unification of state actions in Workers' Health. New players should now become involved, like the Ministries of the Environment and Agriculture, among others. At this moment of critical inventory and celebration, it is important to highlight that the restless and renewing forces are alive, seeking to act on a complex horizon and committed to the country's working classes.

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