

Interfaces

When thinking in the classical “Bills of Mortality” compiling mortality rates due to various morbid circumstances, epidemiology could be dated back to the XVII century. As a specific branch of science however (a science studying the distribution of diseases and other health problems and their determinants in the populations), epidemiology only dates back to the XIX century. We are thus dealing with a very young science that is still consolidating and (re)-defining its paradigms.

As put by Morabia, the good epidemiologist should be sufficiently flexible and consistent for adapting a set of concepts and methods to specific research objects and at the same time should be capable of making these concepts and methods be redefined.

In this beginning of a new millennium epidemiology faces a breathtaking advance in knowledge, not only inside the discipline itself, but also and especially in its increasing interfaces with fields ranging from molecular biology to ecology and social sciences. On the other hand, the world of our days poses pressing challenges to epidemiology and to different fields of knowledge that are establishing interfaces with this discipline, demanding, for example, answers to questions like the deterioration of the quality of life in the great urban centers, the climatic changes or a possible interaction between structural and health problems (such as the inter-relation between drug use and trafficking, violence, environmental pauperization and degradation and dissemination of infectious diseases).

The XXVIII World Congress of Epidemiology/VII Brazilian Congress of Epidemiology to take place from September 20-24, 2008, in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, will give us a well-timed opportunity for examining the contemporary epidemiology with regard to its interfaces with different sciences such as molecular biology, geography, history and anthropology as well as with new methods bordering on mathematics, statistics, biology and medicine.

An epidemiology in constant process of renewal, doubt and proposal of concepts and methods is essential for understanding and assessing the questions of the biomedical sciences in the era of genomics and post-genomics (with the revolution of the so-called functional genomics in course) and for studying the determinants of health and disease, not only on micro- and intra-individual level but also on meso- and inter-individual level (as in the analysis of the dynamics of the social networks) and even on ecological, social and geographical level.

We hope our readers will enjoy this issue of “Ciência e Saúde Coletiva” that is seeking to trace some of the trends of contemporary epidemiology in its interfaces with other sciences and with the contemporary world. Undoubtedly, there are other dimensions that could have been explored. In an issue that is basically fruit of a survey of recent trends in the Brazilian epidemiology however, this is what we were able to bring to light like in the Socratic maxim that the knowledge is latent but has to be “given birth” by organized thinking (in the case of Socrates by philosophy, in the process he called “maieutics”, synonym of “obstetrics”).

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