

## The promise or possibility of being: a culture of healthy living medicine in Latin America

The challenges that patients and their families experience to access care for chronic health conditions often make the health professionals responsible for their care feel powerless. At times, it may be convenient to lay the blame for these challenges on a singular group, such as policymakers or the health insurance system. However, the true reasons such challenges exist are much more complex, multifactorial, and interrelated. A broader systemic analysis and broader vision is needed to integrate the sociocultural context and place a particular focus on vulnerable, underserved populations, including older adults, people living in densely populated areas, people with lower socioeconomic status, migrants, and minorities<sup>1</sup>. In this context, equity and social justice are constructs that may only be feasible in a Utopia but are essential to effect change moving forward.

Social justice as a concept is quite appealing and should be fully embraced by all health care professions<sup>2</sup>. The concept professes that all people should have equal access to wealth, well-being, privilege, opportunity, and health regardless of legal, political, economic, or other circumstances<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, this concept focuses on dimensions beyond civil or criminal law principles and the relationship between individuals and society to lead fulfilling lives. Therefore, social justice is relatable and universal for all regions in the world.

Latin America as a region hosts many countries that share numerous commonalities. Prior to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, there were significant health related challenges in Latin America, including prescription drug shortages, lack of access to healthy food or primary care for migrants, and homelessness. According to the GINI Index, Latin America is the most inequitable region globally; 185 million people's income is below the poverty threshold, of whom 66 million live in extreme poverty<sup>4</sup>. While these underserved communities support each other to supplement these shortcomings by working with local movements, food banks, and religious organizations, significant challenges remain.

The current approach to health care in underrepresented individuals who live in underserved communities is no longer sustainable. The way forward must include healthy living medicine (HLM) as a foundation, at its core promoting physical activity, good nutrition, average body weight, and not smoking. On a systemic level, this cultural change refers to the establishment of policies and practices.

The *promise or possibility of being is here* in Latin America. This approach needs to embrace the concept of social justice so that all individuals in the population have similar opportunities to embrace a healthy lifestyle and minimize the deleterious effects of chronic disease.

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