

BOOK REVIEW

PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION - **Celebrating 100 years of health. The quest for a healthy America.** Washington, PAHO, 2002. 152p. illus. ISBN 92 75 07384 8

This book, *The Quest for a Healthy America: Celebrating 100 Years of Health*, tells through historic and modern photographs the story of public health in the Americas over the course of the last 100 years. Its aim is to honor past achievements and inspire future advances in public health by illustrating the contemporary struggles for health for all the people of the Western Hemisphere.

Through glimpses of the cultural traits and living conditions of the people of the Americas, it reveals the many changes in human life in the Region over the century. The progress brought by major public health initiatives, such as health promotion, disease prevention and control, public information and education, scientific research, and cooperation-at both the grassroots and international levels-can be seen in these pages.

The photographs mirror the makeup and diversity of the Americas. Smiling faces, healthy babies, clean water, health parades, active aging-all highlight the results of good public health interventions. The book is a history of 100 years of human endeavor in all corners of the Americas, with a focus on action rather than chronological history. It tells of efforts across generations, sectors, and nations, with human solidarity at the core.

The book is divided into seven sections. The first, **Beginnings: Necessity Creates Action**, portrays concerns that were paramount at the turn of the 20th century, including immigration, port inspections, innovation, child labor, transportation, and government involvement in health. The photographs of the Panama Canal reflect the extraordinary vision of the time and the will to overcome obstacles. Later, at the inaugural session of a 1940 PAHO meeting, the representative of Colombia, Dr. Jorge Bejarano, would praise the valiant men who made the Canal possible: "This miracle was possible thanks to science, to our science, one and distinct: the science of public health".

The book's second section, **Working Together: Pan Americanism in Action**, shows men and women throughout the century pursuing the common goal of creating a better and healthier world. From rural workers toiling in the soil to a visit by Albert Einstein to a laboratory in Brazil, the idea of joining forces is reflected by health workers, families, communities, and governments. The last photo in this section particularly exemplifies Pan Americanism. A picture of the last child diagnosed with wild poliovirus in the Americas, it is a reminder of the virtue of a continent united through public and private partnerships to ensure that no child in the Americas would ever again be crippled by this disease.

Section three, **Sharing Information: Communicating for Health**, illustrates the link between health outcomes and information. The opening photograph from Peru, a sea of hats, shows community participation in a vaccination campaign. For the last 100 years, people throughout the Americas have exchanged and disseminated information about health, on posters, through marches, in door-to-door visits. Today, the impact of public health collaboration is evident. The people of the Americas live longer; their children are largely protected from most life-threatening illnesses, water and sanitation reach millions of them, and their health conditions in general have improved immeasurably.

The fourth section, **At the Front Lines: Facing Public Health Challenges**, shows determined and courageous men and women tracking down outbreaks, treating patients, inoculating populations against disease, and eliminating disease vectors. Efforts such as these, begun in the Americas, led to the global eradication of smallpox, clearly one of humanity's greatest achievements. Another major accomplishment, banishing polio from the Americas, was made possible by the hard work of millions: from the creator of the oral polio vaccine to the physicians, nurses, and other health workers who labored in cities, towns, and countryside to give the vaccine to millions of the Region's children.

The fifth section, **Health and Development: Creating Tomorrow Today**, shows the aspirations and realities of the many peoples of the Americas, whose work is the engine of the region's economic development. From the young boy who helps feed his family by hauling garbage for recycling, to ironworkers building skyscrapers, to researchers developing new treatments, people can be seen as the driving force behind development, and health as an essential investment in the future.

Our World: The Environment in Which We Live, the book's sixth section, captures the close relationship between humans and the earth: the need for clean water and air, the importance of animals, and the increasing fragility of our environment. Everyday settings-where people work, learn and play-become "healthy spaces" where better health is promoted. Even floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters-as damaging and unpredictable as they may be-have prompted advances in preparation and mitigation.

The book's last section, **Future and Equity: The Visions of Tomorrow**, deals with one of PAHO's guiding principles, that of equity. Throughout the Region and the world, this concept is recognized increasingly as one of the most critical factors in health. Disparities in health in the Americas, particularly as they relate to socioeconomic factors, have important implications for the Organization's work in the next 100 years, necessitating appropriate technical cooperation to bring equitable access to health services to all, and especially those most in need.

The story of health in the Americas is a moving chronicle, a tale of accomplishments and challenges, a story of human success and failure, a saga of victory against incredible odds in the quest to bring health to all the peoples of the continent. The images and words herein provide only a sampling and cannot do full justice to this heroic tale. Yet they can help to show just how far we have come in the Americas-and how far we still have to go.

(Copy of the Introduction)

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