S-52 – Social Movements and the Right to Health Care

History Of Medicine And Public Health

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Abstract:
Reforms of Western health care systems since the 1980s have generated unintended results and have triggered a new series of problems. Governments in Europe, the U.S., and Latin America have attempted to reform health care delivery through the application of free market methods. The structural failures of reformed health systems are evident in increased out-of-pocket expenses for patients, marginalization of vulnerable groups such as immigrants and prisoners, and in some cases a resurgence of health problems previously under control. Various studies show that health system reforms that rely on for-profit economic interests, such as private insurance companies, result not only in more expensive health systems, but negatively affect health care quality and timeliness. The failures of neoliberal health system reforms have been utilized by social and collective organizations as spaces for the articulation and implementation of strategies that claim the right to health a fundamental human right. This symposium discusses the experiences of social movements in Spain, Colombia, the U.S., and Brazil that developed local strategies for ensuring the right to health, and insisted that health is not a commodity subject to market rules. Through these cases, the panel will analyze commonalities among social movements and health reform dynamics, laying the groundwork for explanatory comparative studies of health care system change.

Individual presentations:
Diana Goretty Oviedo (National University of Colombia): Social movements’ challenge to the role of private insurance companies in Colombia’s 1980s health reforms.
Beatrix Hoffman (Northern Illinois University): The history of immigrant activism for the right to health care in the United States, including protests against the Affordable Care Act’s exclusion of undocumented immigrants.
Fiona Macaulay (University of Bradford): Social movement activism around the right of prisoners to health care in Brazil.
Gorka Vellé Bergado (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid): Legal strategies in defense of migrants’ right to health in Spain.

Keywords: social movements – right to health – Latin America – Spain – United States.

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