IHP news 553 : Happy New Year!

(3 Jan 2020)

The weekly International Health Policies (IHP) newsletter is an initiative of the Health Policy unit at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, Belgium.

Dear Colleagues,

Great to see you all more or less safely landed in a new decade and hope you had a great start of the year 2020. For once, we indulge in a bit of shameless advertising in this intro: in case you think you know somebody (or some people) who might be interested in (and could benefit from) this weekly ‘All you can read’ update on global health, do forward the newsletter (or let them subscribe here). You can consider it your first good deed of the year 😊.

I had a reasonably restful week off, spending time with family mostly, but also reading my “annual” weird book (which I tend to keep for the dark cold days between Christmas and New Year), this time round, Living in a Mindful Universe (by Eben Alexander). Don’t quite know what to think of it, but I’m certainly giving Eben the benefit of the doubt given my own (arguably, limited) encounters with the “spiritual realm” in the past. It’s a bit bizarre, however, to see how a neurosurgeon can go from a very materialist worldview towards a 100% (and at times 300 %) spiritual one, that must have been a hell of a near-death experience! He also brings in quite some quantum mechanics to explain his great switch, aiming for, among others, “psychology of the 21st century”. Others among you are perhaps more attracted by the “computer simulation” hypothesis, but I much prefer living in a mindful universe 😊. Do check the book out for yourself.

The past few winter days, I also quite enjoyed listening to Lana del Rey’s dreamy latest record, ‘Norman fucking Rockwell’! There’s nothing like putting one’s – multifocal - glasses aside, and then stare in the blurred lights of the Christmas tree with ‘The Next Best American record’ in the backdrop. From the same country as the Donald, can you believe it.

Anyway. As this is the first newsletter of the year (even kicking off a new decade), I grant myself the privilege to offer some idiosyncratic New Year’s resolutions for global health. I consider it one of the perks of the job 😊. Not that Bill, Tedros & other Seth’s will listen much, but hey, you never know, maybe in alternative universe they just might. So here I go, in no particular order:

1. **In the 20s, Global Health should help push for ‘decent work for all’** and team up with relevant actors on this, in my opinion, core SDG goal. Everywhere. Such an alliance will imply different things in different settings, but it should be a key priority, going far beyond the working conditions of health workers only. It’s clear that this should also entail transformation of current capitalist working conditions (see below).
2. **Put philanthropy back where it belongs**. Instead of billion dollar foundations, philanthropy should be niche, with relatively small money (after the heavy taxation philanthropists and
other billionaires so urgently crave nowadays 😊). They can then focus on ‘risk taking’ and ‘value for (the little) money (left)’ all they want. Needless to say, their oversized influence on global health governance should also disappear in the dustbin of history. Like the dinosaurs.

3. **Democratize global health.** Global health actors could perhaps start by turning the (brand new) year of the nurse & midwife into action. Nurses and midwives need a lot more power, at all levels. And not just in 2020. I suggest we start at the World Economic Forum. Let’s invite hundreds of nurses from all over the world to sit on the panels in Davos, and leave Bill and the others home. I bet we’ll get some frank ‘out of the box’ conversations.

4. Don’t leave it to the Pompeo’s of this world to point out severe human rights issues or worse (eg. China), and see leaders like Modi for what they are: fascists (or at least something that comes damn close 😊). As we should know by now, ‘appeasement’ doesn’t work very well with fascists. Let alone sycophantic tweets or awards.

5. **Clone Richard Horton.**

6. With the horrific scenes from Australia as just the latest example of the climate emergency, the time is surely now for WHO to call for a planetary health emergency (a super PHEIC?), and then follow up with the economic & commercial determinants of health paradigm shift needed to make the transition happen. @Tedros, if not now, then when exactly?

7. Although the worst case climate scenarios perhaps look unrealistic, the “realistic” ones (i.e. the ones we’re heading for) are more than bad enough. Kate Raworth’s New Year’s assessment on Twitter that this is a critical decade, is thus spot on. As she put it, “If ever there was a time that called for 2020 vision, it’s now. What’s your vision and plan for this year, to launch a decade of transformative action - in your own life, in your community, or in your work?” ‘Transformative action’ for global health should, in my humble opinion, also involve daring to think beyond capitalism, and alloying with other forces, social movements and think tanks that try to think of and push for a new economic system that is a lot fairer and more sustainable than the current one. If we don’t make big progress on this in the 20s, we might want to consider migrating to the ‘spiritual realm’ altogether by 2030 as the streets on earth will be full with “Jokers” then.

8. “**Part of our response to the climate emergency must be to slow down in our own lives and responses.**” (Peter Doran, Open Democracy, in an important piece on the link between the attention economy and climate change) In his words, “The franticness and restlessness of modern life has a lot to do with the loss of the contemplative faculty. The totalization of the world of work, including the active life, contributes to this loss of a vital dimension of human experience. Life is impoverished and becomes mere industry if it loses all contemplative moments.” Academics in particular might get some inspiration from How to survive in the era of academic overproduction.

9. **Set up a Lancet Commission on decolonizing global health,** led by institutes and scholars from the South.

10. More in general, we need to try everything to avoid the 20s from becoming a ‘decade of indifference’. I’m guessing that in order to get there, this also has to be the decade of real paradigm shifts.

I’m sure you can come up with many more resolutions for global health in the 20s. Feel free to weigh in and act upon them. The decade has just begun. And keep in mind, ‘global health’, that’s every single one of us. Global health will be, in the end, what we make it.

Enjoy your reading.

Kristof Decoster
Highlights of the week

Year of the Nurse and the Midwife highlights ‘backbone’ of health systems


The year of the Nurse and the Midwife has just kicked off.

“The world will need an additional nine million nurses and midwives to achieve the commitment of providing all people with access to health care by 2030, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned. For this reason, the UN agency and its partners will use the coming year to advocate for greater investment in these crucial health workers. “Nurses and midwives are the backbone of every health system: in 2020 we’re calling on all countries to invest in nurses and midwives as part of their commitment to health for all,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO Director-General. The Year of the Nurse and the Midwife marks the bicentenary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing....”

“Currently, there are 22 million nurses and two million midwives worldwide, accounting for half of the global health workforce, according to WHO. However, the world requires 18 million more health workers—approximately half of them nurses and midwives—to realize universal health coverage before the end of the decade, in line with a pledge that world leaders made at a UN meeting in September....”

See also WHO. And dr. Tedros in his New Year’s address (via UN News) - Investing in health workers yields ‘triple dividend’, WHO chief says in New Year’s message ““Investing in health workers pays a triple dividend for health, economic growth and gender equality”, spelled out the WHO Director-General.”

PS: The Lancet just launched a call for papers coinciding with the Year of the Nurse and Midwife - Nursing in 2020: a call for papers Check it out.

Economist 'World in 2020’ – Florence Nightingale and the changing face of nursing


Very neat ‘big picture’ analysis of how nursing has evolved and will change further in the years to come, as the ‘year of the nurse and the midwife’ kicks off.
Looking back to 2019 & reflecting on the past decade

A look back on global health (and development in general) in 2019


Reflecting on the past decade

**BMJ Feature - Wins, losses, and draws in global health in past 10 years**

[https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l7025](https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l7025)  
*(gated)*  “Sophie Arie highlights five challenges and breakthroughs that defined the decade.”  Ebola, climate change, health technology, antibiotic resistance and gene-editing.


Looking ahead towards 2020 & beyond

Stat – What will 2020 bring for medicine and science? We asked 16 leaders for predictions

**Stat:**

Among others, with the views of Trevor Mundel (Gates Foundation), Vanessa Kerry, and Henrietta Fore (UNICEF). Worth scanning.

Stat - [3 challenges to watch in global health in 2020](https://www.statnews.com/2020/01/02/three-globally-important-challenges-for-2020/)

Focusing among others, on the polio battle & dengue (vaccines).
Reuters - Breakingviews - A health craze for 2020: Chinese medicine

“Move over, connected exercise bikes. There’s a new, more serious healthcare fad for investors: Chinese drugs. U.S. regulators in November approved the first-ever cancer therapy from the People’s Republic. For global pharmaceutical companies, a made-in-China blockbuster drug may be within reach. ... Leading the charge is BeiGene. The Beijing-based company, valued at $12 billion as of early December, focuses on oncology treatments....”

The New Humanitarian (Feature) - Ten humanitarian crises and trends to watch in 2020 - Focus on 10 crises & trends.

And (also in the new Humanitarian) - Aid policy trends to watch in 2020 - Greening relief, more nexus spending, digital threats loom, new threats to humanitarian space, and reforming reforms.

Devex – What to watch for in 2020


“2020 may well be a pivotal year if the world is to have a chance at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals at the end of the decade. Devex President and Editor-in-chief Raj Kumar looks at some of the challenges in the year ahead.”

Another recommended read, with focus on the global development & aid trends expected in 2020. Focus in this analysis on aid politics, aid funding, the humanitarian system, an increasing cold war (redevelopment) with China, and billionaire philanthropy trends.

Lancet – Offline: Prospects for a New World Order

R Horton; https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)33180-0/fulltext

Horton rightly sees our time as a dark time. In this Offline, he gets some inspiration for hope from Chantal Mouffe. “...The political philosopher Chantal Mouffe has proposed “the radicalisation of democracy” through “a common will”. A common will between “the multiplicity of struggles against different forms of domination”—feminism, environmentalism, anti-racism, LGBTQI advocacy, to name but a few. What unites these resistances is opposition to the “philosophy of possessive individualism”. What these resistances have in common is a defence of equality and freedom together (and, I would add, solidarity). Medicine and global health can contribute substantively to this common will. We can help to construct a new people across nations, connecting groups with different demands through the radical idea of active citizenship. Health can be the field where this new frontier challenges the forces of regression in an Age of Entropy.”
Global Health Security

South China Morning Post - Hong Kong takes emergency measures as mystery ‘pneumonia’ infects dozens in China’s Wuhan city


“Hong Kong health authorities are taking no chances with a mysterious outbreak of viral pneumonia in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, warning of symptoms similar to Sars and bird flu as they step up border screening and put hospitals on alert. “The situation in Wuhan is unusual, and we are not sure about the reasons behind the outbreak yet,” said Secretary for Food and Health Sophia Chan Siu-chee said after an urgent night-time meeting with officials and experts on New Year’s Eve. “Since we are now in the holiday season, and Hong Kong has close transport ties with Wuhan, we must stay alert.”…"

See also AFP - China probes mystery pneumonia outbreak amid SARS fears

“Authorities are investigating an outbreak of viral pneumonia in central China amid online speculation that it might be linked to SARS, the flu-like virus that killed hundreds of people a decade ago. There were 27 cases of "viral pneumonia of unknown origin" reported in Wuhan, in central Hubei province, the city’s health commission said in a statement…."

But other severe pneumonia is more likely. For the latest update, see Cidrap News - No answers yet in China’s pneumonia outbreak (2 Jan)

“As Chinese scientists continue their probe of an unusual viral pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan, local officials yesterday closed the seafood market that was linked to the cases, as governments in nearby Asian destinations stepped up their surveillance in travelers and at hospitals. The yet- unidentified source of the outbreak has led to rumors, mainly on social media, about a possible severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak and speculation about the possible emergence of a new zoonotic virus. Earlier this week, officials in Hubei province said 27 people were sick with pneumonia, 7 of them in serious condition, and that all were isolated…."

And see Bloomberg - Pneumonia outbreak spurs fever checks from Singapore to Taiwan.

BMJ Global Health (Practice) - Validating Joint External Evaluation reports with the quality of outbreak response in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Madagascar

R Garfield et al ; https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/6/e001655

“To date more than 100 countries have carried out a Joint External Evaluation (JEE) as part of their Global Health Security programme. The JEE is a detailed effort to assess a country’s capacity to prevent, detect and respond to population health threats in 19 programmatic areas. To date no attempt has been made to determine the validity of these measures. We compare scores and commentary from the JEE in three countries to the strengths and weaknesses identified in the response to a subsequent large-scale outbreak in each of those countries. Relevant indicators were
compared qualitatively, and scored as low, medium or in a high level of agreement between the JEE and the outbreak review in each of these three countries. Three reviewers independently reviewed each of the three countries. A high level of correspondence existed between score and text in the JEE and strengths and weaknesses identified in the review of an outbreak. In general, countries responded somewhat better than JEE scores indicated, but this appears to be due in part to JEE-related identification of weaknesses in that area. The improved response in large measure was due to more rapid requests for international assistance in these areas. It thus appears that even before systematic improvements are made in public health infrastructure that the JEE process may assist in improving outcomes in response to major outbreaks.”


“In June, 2019, delegates from more than 65 countries attended the first international Global Health Security conference in Sydney to debate how to strengthen global health security and contain epidemics at source. The Sydney Statement on global health security, announced as a “product of this conference”, was presented in its final form on the first day of the conference with seven guiding principles, including reference to the values of “integrity of international norms, respect for human rights, and social justice...[and] transparent decision making”. Global health security is an energising way of framing risk, of mobilising resources, increasing provision of development assistance for health, and clarifying the international obligations of nation states. But how had the countries of the Global South been consulted in formulating the Statement, and were their own priorities for health and their perceptions of risk considered?...”

Turns out there’s certainly a lot of room for improvement... “Any overarching statement on global health security requires structured, inclusive, and incisive debate from all stakeholders, particularly from the Global South, such as the deliberations proposed for identifying synergies across related initiatives by the Lancet Commission. The purpose and nature of global health security is too important to be established through asynchronous online contributions and normalised through social media.”

Ebola DRC

Cidrap News – Five more Ebola cases confirmed in past 2 days

http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/01/five-more-ebola-cases-confirmed-past-2-days

(update as of 2 Jan) “According to the World Health Organization’s (WHO’s) Ebola dashboard, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) saw five more Ebola cases in the past 2 days. The outbreak total now stands at 3,382, including 2,232 deaths....”
Guardian - We were so close': how unrest in Congo thwarted the battle against Ebola


(as of 23 December) “World Health Organization rues spike in violence that impeded efforts of health workers when outbreak was almost under control.”

“We were down to the last two transmission chains,” explained Mike Ryan, executive director of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) health emergencies programme. “We were so close to finishing,” he said, exasperated....”

Let’s hope the new year will bring the end of this Ebola outbreak in the DRC soon.

MSF Analysis – Ebola Healthcare at Gunpoint – the New Normal?
http://msf-analysis.org/ebola-healthcare-gunpoint-new-normal/#.Xg4fx5jbd9g.twitter

MSF staff H Pagano & E Lampaert challenge how the Ebola outbreak response is being run.

“...How did the Ebola response arrive at the point where WHO feels lifesaving treatment can only be delivered with the protection of armed forces?...”

“Hard lessons will need to be learnt, including by MSF, on this Ebola response. Never have we seen a response to an Ebola epidemic with an operational WHO, a government determined to assert its full control of an epidemic of this scale, and in an active conflict zone where trust and acceptance are easily undermined. We can’t accept that the current approach becomes the new normal. ... ... There are no simple answers here. We’ve seen from experience that militarised aid often backfires and escalates insecurity. The solution to any epidemic, Ebola or otherwise, cannot be to provide care at gunpoint.”

Lancet Letter – The responsibility and potential of public health
R Dhillon et al; https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)31911-7/fulltext

“In 2019, the Editors proposed that the challenges to halting the Ebola outbreak in the DR Congo are “principally a political problem” and no longer within the scope of public health. This assertion problematically compartmentalises the social and political drivers of health outside the purview and responsibility of the medical community, and it implies that simply pursuing conventional public health approaches is a good enough response, even if such approaches are insufficiently effective because of social and political factors. We disagree and think that the obligation of public health must be to achieve healthful outcomes, even if that entails navigating messy politics and daunting social challenges or reformulating delivery strategies to overcome related barriers. ...”
SRHR

WHO (report) - Funding for sexual and reproductive health and rights in low- and middle-income countries: threats, outlook and opportunities


“This report, commissioned by PMNCH, takes stock of current and potential future investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), to inform discussions on how to ensure adequate support for SRHR. It provides analysis of SRHR funding by donors and low- and middle-income country governments, which is crucial as much of the needed growth in SRHR funding will have to come from domestic sources....”

“...While all countries should include SRHR in their path towards universal health coverage (UHC), and many countries are including common elements of SRHR (primarily family planning, maternal, and newborn health) in their UHC packages and plans, inclusion of a full package of SRHR interventions is rare, and by no means guaranteed. Moreover, despite official development assistance (ODA) for SRHR and funding provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation amounting to US$11.3 billion in 2017, an all-time high, donors invested a lower share of their overall health funding in SRHR compared to previous years. The evidence presented and recommendations made in this report support countries to prioritize health, including SRHR in their domestic budgets as well as encourage donors to include SRHR as an integral part of UHC efforts and to protect health investments from other emerging priorities. Nevertheless, a new global movement to mobilize political and financial support for SRHR is needed to sustain investments.”

Lancet Editorial – 2020: a critical year for women, gender equity, and health

https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)33170-8/fulltext

“2020 is set to be a year of milestones for women, gender equity, and health. 5 years into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 10 years since the establishment of UN Women, 20 years since the landmark UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security, and 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 2020 is an important year for reflection, commitment, and action....”

“Despite the pledges made in Beijing in 1995, the global community’s commitments to SDG 3 and SDG 5, and the increasingly compelling body of evidence for how gender inequalities shape health, perhaps the most striking feature of the past 25 years has been the neglect of gender equality by mainstream public health and development programming.....”

The Editorial then lists what the Lancet already does and has in store to mainstream gender equity and concludes: “The Beijing+25 anniversary creates an important window of opportunity for the gender equity community to capture the attention of key national and global decision makers. A UN Commission on the Status of Women review will take place in March; July will see the Generation Equality Forum in Mexico City; and a UN high-level meeting is planned for September. Sustainable development cannot occur without gender equity. It is time for this principle to be applied with commitment to specific health challenges.
Guardian - Everybody is talking about it': women's rights to take centre stage in 2020


“Campaigners hail year of key global gatherings and events as vital opportunity to secure ‘bold, accountable commitments and action’.”

“Over the course of the year, thousands of people are expected to attend high-level UN events and forums in Mexico City and Paris to mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing platform for action, a landmark agreement to end gender inequality....”

Lancet Comment - Countering the pandemic of gender-based violence and maltreatment of young people: The Lancet Commission

F M Knaul et al ; https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)33136-8/fulltext

“...Gender Based Violence is a public health priority, an equity imperative, a travesty of human rights, and an economic sinkhole. ...”

“...The Lancet Commission on Gender-based Violence and Maltreatment of Young People seeks to create knowledge essential to counter the pandemic. Over the coming 2–3 years, the Commission will generate new tools and data to enable policy makers and advocates to catalyse and scale up effective policies, interventions, and programmes in health, education, income-generation, and gender equality. The work will apply the most recent analytic frameworks and methods to a subject that has been grossly under-researched. ...”

Children’s health

UN News - Deadly decade: UNICEF reports three-fold rise in verified attacks on children since 2010


“Conflicts around the world are lasting longer and claiming more young lives, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said, as the agency reported that over this ‘deadly decade’, there has been a three-fold rise in verified attacks on children since 2010 – an average of 45 violations a day....”
Access to Medicines

Lancet Editorial – Biosimilars: a new era in access to breast cancer treatment

https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)33172-1/fulltext

“For the first time, on Dec 18, 2019, WHO granted “prequalification” status to a biosimilar drug, for the treatment of breast cancer. Distinct from generics, biosimilars are interchangeable biological medicines of the same safety, quality, and efficacy in patients. Trastuzumab, the reference monoclonal antibody biologic, specifically targets cells expressing HER2, and has been the standard of care since 2005 for early and advanced forms of HER2-positive breast cancer—about 20% of the 2·1 million new diagnoses globally each year...”

Great news for LMICs, among others. “...in low-income and middle-income countries where the breast cancer rates are increasing most and where WHO recommendations are relied on to guide procurement of medicines, the prequalification status of the biosimilar has the potential to provide a more direct pipeline to a treatment.”

“In an upcoming report, The Lancet Commission on diagnostics will consider how technology, innovation, and pragmatism must coalesce to improve accurate diagnoses and save lives. Breast cancer is one area in which that transformative work needs to occur and where diagnosis and treatment must be considered jointly....”

Global Health Governance

Global Fund (News) - Agence Française de Développement and the Global Fund Strengthen Partnership to Build Resilient Systems for Health


(21 Dec) “On the occasion of President Emmanuel Macron’s visit to Côte d’Ivoire, Remy Rioux, Chief Executive Officer of Agence Française de Développement, and Peter Sands, Executive Director of the Global Fund, signed a partnership agreement to end epidemics and build sustainable systems for health in West and Central Africa, two regions where these challenges are particularly acute. Through this agreement, AFD and the Global Fund will strengthen the impact of their investments in health through better coordinated and complementary interventions and the optimal use of resources. This approach will accelerate the establishment of strong and sustainable systems for health and support governments’ efforts in West and Central Africa. In the coming years, this partnership will help improve the training of health workers, increase their numbers, strengthen the diagnostic capacities of laboratories and supply chain systems and support national authorities’ health financing strategies. Côte d’Ivoire is leading the way in the partnership between AFD and the Global Fund...”

See also a Project Syndicate Op-Ed by Rioux & Sands - A World Without AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria
“...Avoiding silo-based activity is the raison d’être of the recent partnership agreement between the Global Fund and the AFD. Under the leadership of national health authorities, we are pursuing greater convergence and synergy among programs to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, such as those the Global Fund finances, and initiatives to strengthen health systems, such as those in which the AFD invests. Underscoring the extent to which these two areas are interconnected, the Global Fund is already the largest multilateral provider of grants for strengthening health systems, investing well over $1 billion per year in the cause....”

Lancet Letter – Careful governance of African biobanks


“In a World Report, 54gene (a start-up genomics company) was featured as the first pan-African biobank that plans to collect 40 000 biospecimens from ten hospitals in Nigeria by the end of 2019. The World Report has subsequently been reproduced in the media. In a world where media reports are dominated by fake news, clarification of African biobank initiatives is imperative....”

Decolonizing global health

NPR Goats & Soda - Opinion: It’s Time To End The Colonial Mindset In Global Health


Karan also explores what we can do about it.

He concludes: “At its worst, global health today is a self-congratulatory neocolonial machine in which doctors, professors, researchers and others from wealthy places with abounding privilege are further exalted because they are doing work that their Global South counterparts do as part of their everyday lives with little to no recognition. At its best, it is a humble attempt to equal the playing field of life between North and South by trying to unravel the tightly bound chains of colonialism.”

NCDs

FT - Asian countries watch as Singapore expands ‘war on diabetes’

https://www.ft.com/content/8e7e2298-2130-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b

“Absolute advertising ban proposed on high-sugar drinks as part of fight against disease.”

...Most countries tend to impose time limits on television advertising to shield children from unhealthy food, whose “impact can be very small,” Mr Zee said. Singapore’s total ban, however,
would have a “huge impact” on unhealthy products, hopefully pushing food manufacturers to reform these goods. Whereas “if you’re taxed, often they [manufacturers] pass the cost of the tax on to the consumer,” he added. …

... If Singapore can make headway, other Asian countries will be watching. According to a 2017 Asian Development Bank Institute report, at 1bn, the Asia-Pacific region hosts the largest absolute number of obese and overweight people in the world. ...

Guardian - Coke, crisps, convenience: how ads created a global junk food generation

“From Bangladesh to Britain, blanket exposure to promotional material for unhealthy foods is encouraging children to eat badly, new research claims…”

“...100 schoolchildren in seven countries were asked by researchers from University College London to film themselves and the food they eat for a study about the exposure of children to unhealthy diets....”

Planetary Health

Lancet Planetary Health (Editorial) - Looking backwards and forwards
https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(19)30249-9/fulltext

Great short editorial, looking back on 2019 using a planetary health lens, and then ahead. Some excerpts:

“Looking back over 2019 through a planetary health lens, the key themes of the year might be emerging public awareness and advocacy, and inadequate practical action. The rhetoric around climate change has notably changed with “climate emergency” and “climate breakdown” and “public health emergency” being increasingly used to describe the various climate challenges we are inflicting upon ourselves. ... ... The value and potential for youth leadership has also emerged as a key theme over the last year, while the IPBES global assessment report also brought home the true severity of the biodiversity crisis that we are facing. Meanwhile, many of the sustainable development goals are looking increasingly far from being achievable by 2030, with some even worsening. These are not disparate unconnected problems, but are all maladies of our current socioeconomic system; the net effect is far from what we could reasonably describe as a state of planetary health. ... ... The health implications of unchecked climate heating are also becoming increasingly clear ... “

Conclusion: “ We have focused primarily on the climate emergency here given the ongoing COP25 conference and the importance of climate stability to all other endeavours, but issues of human development and protection of nature are no less important or crosscutting. As we move increasingly
from only providing evidence of the nature of the problems we face to also prioritising and implementing solutions, we need to embrace the inherently political nature of those choices. As has been identified in climate change adaptation, these choices need to be understood as sociopolitical processes rather than politically neutral managerial decisions. If we cannot take that step, then the gap between talk and action is likely to continue to confound us.”

PS: You might also want to read, in the December issue of the Lancet Planetary Health, Incorporating qualitative methodologies and fieldwork into large scale, quantitative analyses of climate health in low-income countries.

NYT – In strongest climate ruling yet, Dutch court orders leaders to take action


(20 Dec). See some tweets:

“This is huge, huge news. Today, the Netherlands Supreme Court ruled that radical emissions reductions — 25% by the end of 2020 — are "mandatory". This is the first time in the world that a citizens-led lawsuit has found a legal duty to prevent climate change. .... The Dutch Supreme Court ruling is big news. The govt has a legal duty to combat climate change, and must cut emissions by 25% in 12 months. The decision is based on the European Convention on Human Rights, thus enabling citizens in all 47 signatory states to take similar action.”

Intelligencer - We’re Getting a Clearer Picture of the Climate Future — and It’s Not as Bad as It Once Looked


“For once, the climate news might be better than you thought. It’s certainly better than I’ve thought. You may not have noticed it, amid the flood of bad news about the “Emissions Gap” and the collapse of the COP25 climate conference in Madrid, but over the last few weeks a new narrative about the climate future has emerged, on balance encouraging, at least to an alarmist like me. It is this: As best as we can understand and project the medium- and long-term trajectories of energy use and emissions, the window of possible climate futures is probably narrowing, with both the most optimistic scenarios and the most pessimistic ones seeming, now, less likely. That narrowing contains both good and bad news — what was recently the best to hope for now seems vanishingly unlikely, and what was the worst to fear much less likely, too....”

So not as bad as it once looked, but still really, really bad. Given also, what we’re already seeing in Australia, among others, at a relatively ‘small’ level of increase of temperature.

Recommended read.

Earth 'at a tipping point': Royal family launches climate crusade

“Launching "the most prestigious environmental prize in history", Prince William on Tuesday said humans faced a "stark choice": ... While Prince William and his father, Prince Charles, have long campaigned on environmental awareness, the blunt language used to reveal the first details of the so-called Earthshot Prize is rare for such senior members of the royal family. The Earthshot Prize will aim to uncover solutions to climate change across all parts of industry and society. Drawing comparisons to the Nobel peace prize, multimillion-pound prizes will be awarded to five winners a year over 10 years. Recipients could include scientists, activists, economists, political leaders, governments, banks, businesses, cities and even countries.....”

Guardian - We are seeing the very worst of our scientific predictions come to pass in these bushfires
J Gergis; https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/03/we-are-seeing-the-very-worst-of-our-scientific-predictions-come-to-pass-in-these-bushfires

“As a climate scientist I am wondering if the Earth system has now breached a tipping point.”

Excerpt: “...It’s no exaggeration to say my work as scientist now keeps me up at night. As I’ve watched the events of this summer unfolding, I’ve found myself wondering whether the Earth system has now breached a tipping point, an irreversible shift in the stability of the planetary system. There may now be so much heat trapped in the system that we may have already triggered a domino effect that could unleash a cascade of abrupt changes that will continue to play out in the years and decades to come. Rapid climate change has the potential to reconfigure life on the planet as we know it. We know this because the geologic record contains evidence that these events have occurred in the past. The key difference is that we’ve never had 7.5 billion people on the planet, so the human species really is in uncharted territory. The scientific community is acknowledging this by including new sections on abrupt climate change throughout key areas of the upcoming IPCC report. We now consider these “low probability, high impact” scenarios an increasingly critical part of our work....”

SDGs

Nature – Editorial: Get the Sustainable Development Goals back on track
https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03907-4

“At the current rate, most of the goals will not be met. Here’s how the 2030 agenda can be put back on the right path.”

“...To be achieved, the SDGs need to become mandatory — not necessarily in the legal sense, but in the sense that nations have to know that there’s no alternative but to make them happen....”

And a quote on the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR):

“The first report’s authors are aware that the SDGs lack a mandatory reporting mechanism, and that in some cases the goals are competing with GDP goals. And they have come up with an innovative
solution. They recommend that nations consider redistributing the 17 SDGs into 6 ‘entry points’. These are: human well-being (including eliminating poverty and improving health and education); sustainable economies (including reducing inequality); access to food and nutrition; access to — and decarbonizing — energy; urban development; and the global commons (combining biodiversity and climate change). This is a sensible recommendation. A focus on a smaller, more integrated set of goals could help to reduce instances in which implementing one of the SDGs has the potential to hinder another....”

Do check out also (Nature Editorial ) - A better way for countries to track their progress on sustainability

“A US–Chinese team shows how sustainability metrics can be improved.”

“In Nature this week, a team led by researchers from Michigan State University in East Lansing and China Agricultural University in Beijing show how it’s possible to use the SDG reporting framework to construct an index that allows progress to be compared across regions and over periods of time...”

**Polio**

Science (news) - Polio eradication program faces hard choices as endgame strategy falters


Great analysis of the current situation. “The “endgame” in the decades long campaign to eradicate polio suffered major setbacks in 2019. While the effort lost ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which recorded 116 cases of wild polio—four times the number in 2018—an especially alarming situation developed in Africa. In 12 countries, 196 children were paralyzed not by the wild virus, but by a strain derived from a live vaccine that has regained its virulence and ability to spread. Fighting these flare-ups will mean difficult decisions in the coming year....”

“The culprit in Africa is vaccine-derived polio virus type 2, and the fear is that it will jump continents and reseed outbreaks across the globe. A brand new vaccine is now being rushed through development to quash type 2 outbreaks. Mass production has already begun, even though the vaccine is still in clinical trials; it could be rolled out for emergency use as early as mid-2020. At the same time, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) is debating whether to combat the resurgent virus by re-enlisting a triple-whammy vaccine pulled from global use in 2016. That would be a controversial move, setting back the initiative several years, as well as a potential public relations disaster—an admission that the carefully crafted endgame strategy has failed....”

In other polio news, see HPW - Immunization And Surveillance Help Stop Polio Outbreaks In 3 African Countries, Says WHO

(23 Dec) “Kenya, Mozambique and Niger curbed different outbreaks of vaccine-derived poliovirus over the past 24 months which affected 14 children, said a senior WHO official on Monday.
Although wild poliovirus virus has not been detected in Africa since 2016, roughly 12 countries are currently facing outbreaks of vaccine-derived poliovirus....

Some Papers of the week

WHO Bulletin – January issue

https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/98/1/en/

- Start with the Editorial - Improving quality of care in fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable settings (by S B Syed et al)

“The World Health Organization (WHO) is currently working with partners to address quality of care in fragile, conflict-affected and vulnerable settings. .... These efforts build on WHO’s national quality policy and strategy initiative, on an emerging academic and experiential knowledge base, and on foundational efforts on quality health services from across the humanitarian and development sectors. This work supports WHO’s quality improvement task team that was recently created under the global health cluster, a network of partners that works in humanitarian emergencies. The following eight interdependent elements are proposed as key considerations in developing a strategic approach to quality action planning in such settings....”

- Make sure you also check out the Research article (already online for a while) Development assistance for community health workers in 114 low- and middle-income countries, 2007–2017 (by Chunling Lu et al)

HP&P - Measuring health system resilience in a highly fragile nation during protracted conflict: South Sudan 2011–15


“Health systems resilience (HSR) is defined as the ability of a health system to continue providing normal services in response to a crisis, making it a critical concept for analysis of health systems in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS). However, no consensus for this definition exists and even less about how to measure HSR. We examine three current HSR definitions (maintaining function, improving function and achieving health system targets) using real-time data from South Sudan to develop a data-driven understanding of resilience....”

Journal of Equity in Health - Pooling arrangements in health financing systems: a proposed classification

“The function of pooling and the ways that countries organize this is critical for countries’ progress towards universal health coverage, but its potential as a policy instrument has not received much attention. We provide a simple classification of country pooling arrangements and discuss the specific ways that fragmentation manifests in each and the typical challenges with respect to universal health coverage objectives associated. This can help countries assess their pooling setup and contribute to identifying policy options to address fragmentation or mitigate its consequences....”

Some blogs & mainstream articles of the past weeks

Lancet Letter – We need to talk about guilt in global health education
S H van Wees; https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32965-4/fulltext

“Global health is built on a history of unequal relationships, domination, wealth extraction, and hierarchies of what constitutes good knowledge. Richard Horton’s Comment about transcending that global health guilt was a welcome and motivational text for my students of politics of global health. Many students of the history and politics of global health become disillusioned and are upset about that guilt, so I thank him for discussing it in a spirit of optimism. Although I welcome this optimism, I do not believe that we allocate sufficient space to engage with this guilt in global health education....”

Nature News - Low-carbon, virtual science conference tries to recreate social buzz
https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03899-1

“The organizers of an international biology meeting asked psychologists to assess their attempts at retaining the advantages of traditional conferences.” Was fairly successful, apparently.

Bretton Woods Project - IMF and World Bank complicit in ‘austerity as new normal’, despite availability of alternatives

“Austerity projected to affect 5.8 billion people by 2021; UN offers handbook on alternative financing options; IMF and World Bank continue to cling to unnecessary and harmful fiscal orthodoxy.”

Tweet of the week

Anthony Costello:
“My New Year hope. That the UN and the health community stop flying round the world needlessly for conferences only rich in rhetoric and platitudes. #stopflying.”

Global governance of health

Guardian - Google says it will no longer use 'Double Irish, Dutch sandwich' tax loophole

https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jan/01/google-says-it-will-no-longer-use-double-irish-dutch-sandwich-tax-loophole

“International tax authorities were welcoming in the New Year after Google’s parent company, Alphabet, announced it will no longer use a notorious tax loophole known as the “Double Irish, Dutch sandwich”. The technique allowed the tech giant to delay paying US taxes on international earnings for years, and pay a lower tax rate overseas. It is thought to have allowed American companies to cut their tax bills by hundreds of billions of dollars, but is finally being closed by authorities. A Google spokesman confirmed the company would scrap the intellectual property licensing structure, by which international profits are channelled through Ireland and on to Caribbean tax havens, putting them outside the reach of US tax authorities....”

Global Policy - IMF-World Bank Cooperation Before and After the Global Financial Crisis


“This article adopts a diachronic view to compare patterns of institutional evolution of cooperation between the International Monetary Fund (IMF or Fund) and the World Bank (or Bank) before and after the global financial crisis. While the rules for Fund-Bank cooperation had typically been tightened in response to crisis episodes, on balance they were loosened in the wake of the global financial crisis. Building on over 90 semi-structured expert interviews and relevant official documentation, I argue that this new trend was grounded in changed imaginaries of cooperation among IMF and World Bank officials. Whereas they had tended to envisage integrative futures in key areas of operational overlap before the crisis, alternative visions of more fragmented joint futures came to prevail after it. This difference manifested itself in a profound shift in official discourses about, as well as interviewee accounts of, the function of the Financial Sector Assessment Programme (FSAP) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The analysis foregrounds the reflexivity of relationships between international organisations (IOs), especially the ability of IO staff involved in cooperative activities to (re)construct imaginaries that can foster or foreclose inter-organisational change.”
"China's development lending to already-indebted countries has provoked accusations that it is engaging in “debt-trap diplomacy.” This reflects a narrow understanding of development assistance that has hampered progress in low-income countries for far too long."

"...This underscores the value of using development assistance to increase a country’s stock of public-sector assets – precisely what China has been doing for its partners. Rather than condemn this approach as “debt-trap diplomacy”...

Devex - Opinion: European development cooperation has reached a fork in the road

M Ryan; Devex;

“As Neven Mimica hangs up his boots as the European Union’s commissioner in charge of development cooperation, it is worth reflecting on his legacy and on whether the machine he steered is set to tackle future challenges under his successor, Jutta Urpilainen.”

“...Much is to be lauded when it comes to the EU’s engagement in development cooperation. For many years, it has been one of the last bastions of budget support — where governments transfer resources to other governments to use as they see fit to combat poverty, which is widely considered the most effective way to establish real development partnerships. ... ... But all of this seems to be changing with an emerging “policy-driven” approach of the new European Commission, in which development objectives will be subsidiary to the wider EU strategy. During his term, Mimica had a foot in each of the camps, continuing many of the best practices of budget support but also laying the ground for a shift toward policy-driven EU development cooperation.

UN News - Secretary-General calls for global participation in UN75 dialogues for better future for all


“The United Nations on Wednesday launched the biggest global conversation on the world’s future: the UN75 dialogues. Views and ideas gathered throughout the year will be shared at a high-level event in September to mark the Organization’s 75th anniversary. The UN75 initiative is described as a "global reality check" to spark conversations around building a better future for all...."
Book review - Geopolitics in Health: Confronting Obesity, Aids and Tuberculosis in the Emerging BRICS Economies

https://read.dukeupress.edu/jhppl/article/44/6/955/139738/Geopolitics-in-Health-Confronting-Obesity-Aids-and

Victor Rodwin reviews a 2018 book from Eduardo J Gomez. “...The main argument in this book is that BRICS's response to “international criticism and pressure” from other nations and multilateral organizations “for an improved response to epidemics”—what he calls “geopolitical positioning”—is one of two critical factors to explain the formation of their policies to confront HIV/AIDS. The second critical factor involves a combination of what he calls the state's ability to implement a “centrist policy response” which itself requires strong “bureaucratic-civil societal partnerships” and is sorely lacking in all of BRICS except for Brazil....”

UHC

BMJ Editorial - Universal health coverage in the UK

L Hiam, R Yates et al; https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l7054

“The fundamental principles of the NHS are under threat.” “The UK’s national health service was founded on the principles of treatment based on need regardless of ability to pay. As an early example of universal health coverage, it has often been looked to by countries seeking to emulate it. At home, it is seen as something that captures the national identity, as was apparent in its prominence in the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics. However, changes implemented by the governments in power since 2010 threaten to undermine its fundamental principles, and especially that of universal access to healthcare....”

Quick link:

Journal of Equity in Health - The state of enrollment on the National Health Insurance Scheme in rural Ghana after eight years of implementation

Planetary health

Intelligencer - Global Apathy Toward the Fires in Australia Is a Scary Portent for the Future

“A months-long climate disaster in a wealthy, white country is tailor-made to dominate news coverage. It hasn’t.”

**Infectious diseases & NTDs**

Guardian - *We can beat Ebola but must prepare for what comes next,’ says Wellcome Trust head*


“Jeremy Farrar, a world expert on diseases, tells of the fight against the deadly virus that spread fear this decade – and how to prepare for the health battles to come.”

“...The success he sees in DRC over Ebola is important not just for that disease, he added. There are a number of other illnesses – including Lassa, Mers, Nipah, Marburg and Dengue – which have the potential to become widespread epidemics as a result of climate change or other ecological shifts – and changes in society – in Africa or Asia or Europe. ... ... “The lesson from Ebola is that for all these conditions we will need to create vaccines and treatments, where there are none today, over the next 10 years – and we are going to need them. Mers, Lassa and Dengue all have the potential to shift from relatively low infection rates to high ones just as Ebola did in response to ecological change, travel and urbanisation. The world is now very exposed...”

**NEJM - Pathogen Genomics in Public Health**


“Rapid advances in DNA sequencing technology (“next-generation sequencing”) have inspired optimism about the potential of human genomics for “precision medicine.” Meanwhile, *pathogen genomics is already delivering “precision public health”* through more effective investigations of outbreaks of foodborne illnesses, better-targeted tuberculosis control, and more timely and granular influenza surveillance to inform the selection of vaccine strains. In this article, we describe how public health agencies have been adopting pathogen genomics to improve their effectiveness in almost all domains of infectious disease. This momentum is likely to continue, given the ongoing development in sequencing and sequencing-related technologies.”

**NEJM - Schistosomiasis — Assessing Progress toward the 2020 and 2025 Global Goals**

“With the vision of “a world free of schistosomiasis,” the World Health Organization (WHO) set ambitious goals of control of this debilitating disease and its elimination as a public health problem by 2020 and 2025, respectively. As these milestones become imminent, and if programs are to succeed, it is important to evaluate the WHO programmatic guidelines empirically....”

Plos Med (Editorial) - Personalized public health: An implementation research agenda for the HIV response and beyond

E Geng et al; [https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003020](https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003020)

“We have arrived at a moment in the global HIV response where implementation research is ready to take center stage....”

BMJ Feature - Despite being a dim memory in some parts of the world, TB grinds on in many low and middle income countries

[https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l7050](https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l7050)

“Tuberculosis is the world’s number one infectious killer. The recently concluded World Conference on Lung Health offered treatment and prevention options that may someday bring the numbers down, Swati Sanyal Tarafdar found.”

Science - Measles may have emerged when large cities rose, 1500 years earlier than thought


“Old museum sample of infected lung sheds light on origins of now-resurgent virus.”

Science – Uncovering the ART of antimalarial resistance

D Marapana et al; [https://science.sciencemag.org/content/367/6473/22](https://science.sciencemag.org/content/367/6473/22)

“A key mechanism of resistance to the antimalarial drug artemisinin is identified.”

Quick links:
• **Guardian** - *Facebook removes false HIV-prevention ads after LGBTQ+ outcry*

“The ads, which were on Facebook for months before the company acted, contained false claims about side effects of anti-HIV drugs.”

• **Stat** - *Delivering the TB vaccine by IV better protects monkeys, new study finds*

“A new study suggests that a simple tweak could make a century-old vaccine for tuberculosis far more effective — but that shift could prove difficult in practice. Researchers found that **increasing the dose of a TB vaccine and delivering it intravenously** better protected monkeys against the infection than the standard method, of injecting the vaccine into the skin. The scientists reported their findings Wednesday in *Nature*....”

**AMR**

**BMJ Global Health Blog - Applying Implementation Science to Improve Antimicrobial Stewardship: Why is it Important?**


“...Particularly, in low resource settings in LMICs, implementation research will reveal key barriers and facilitators to the implementation of AMS interventions in these unique settings. This will guide the design of tailor-made, theoretically underpinned interventions and successful evaluation of these interventions. ... ... The world is faced with dwindling investments in the development of new antibiotics. Also, there are suboptimal infection prevention and control practices in many countries. **To tackle the global health problem of AMR, implementation research to improve AMS needs to be prioritised...”**

**Stat Op-Ed - Antibiotic resistance nearly killed me. That’s why I’m raising awareness of it**

[https://www.statnews.com/2019/12/31/antibiotic-resistance-nearly-killed-me/](https://www.statnews.com/2019/12/31/antibiotic-resistance-nearly-killed-me/)

Testimony by D M Ricci.

“...That’s why I joined the *Antimicrobial Resistance Fighter Coalition*, a non-commercial organization devoted to increasing awareness of antimicrobial resistance, encouraging personal responsibility to combat it, and mobilizing action across a wide range of groups interested in it or affected by it....”

From their website: “*The Antimicrobial Resistance Fighter Coalition* aspires to change behaviors across the globe that will maintain the effectiveness of antibiotics for future generations.”
It has been well-documented recently that 5 billion people globally lack surgical care. Also well-documented is the need to improve mass casualty disaster response. Many of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030—healthcare and economic milestones—require significant improvement in global surgical care, particularly in low-income and middle-income countries. Trauma/stroke centres evolved in high-income countries with evidence that 24/7/365 surgical and critical care markedly improved morbidity and mortality for trauma and stroke and for cardiovascular events, difficult childbirth, acute abdomen. Duplication of emergency services, especially civilian and military, often results in suboptimal, expensive care. By combining all healthcare resources within the ongoing healthcare system, more efficient care for both individual emergencies and mass casualty situations can be achieved. We describe progress in establishing mass casualty centres in Chile and Pakistan. In both locations, planning among the stakeholders (primarily civilian and military) indicates the feasibility of such integrated surgical and emergency care. We also review other programmes and initiatives to provide integrated mass casualty disaster response. Integrated mass casualty centres are a feasible means to improve both day-to-day surgical care and mass casualty disaster response. The humanitarian aspect of mass casualty disasters facilitates integration among stakeholders—from local healthcare systems to military resources to international healthcare organisations. The benefits of mass casualty centres—both healthcare and economic—can facilitate achieving the 2030 UN SDGs.”

“...‘If you’re living, you want to be living well,’” said Tim Peterson, an assistant professor of internal medicine at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. “Most people who were interested in life span and were studying genes — which control life span — switched to ‘healthspan.’” “Healthspan,” a coinage now gaining traction, refers to the years that a person can expect to live in generally good health — free of chronic illnesses and cognitive decline that can emerge near life’s end. Although there’s only so much a person can do to delay the onset of disease, there’s plenty that scientists are learning to improve your chances of a better healthspan....”
Globalization & Health – Social capital is associated with improved subjective well-being of older adults with chronic non-communicable disease in six low- and middle-income countries


Some of the findings: “Social capital was associated with increased subjective well-being of adults in all the six countries. The positive association between social capital and subjective well-being was higher for those with a single chronic condition than those with multiple chronic conditions in India and South Africa. Conversely, an increase in the likelihood of having higher subjective well-being as social capital increased was greater for those with multiple chronic conditions compared to those with a single chronic condition in Ghana. ... The findings suggest that improving the social capital of older adults with chronic diseases could potentially improve their subjective well-being....”

Quick link:

WSJ - FDA to Ban All E-Cigarette Pod Flavors Except Tobacco and Menthol

“Impact on small businesses and Trump’s re-election prospects drive compromise.”

Sexual & Reproductive / maternal, neonatal & child health

BMJ Feature - Challenges abound for women’s sexual and reproductive rights

https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l7000

“Health leaders gathered at the second International Conference on Population and Development in Nairobi last month to discuss how to improve women’s sexual and reproductive health. At the meeting Rojita Adhikari talked to Herminia Palacio, newly appointed president of the Guttmacher Institute, about the challenges and possibilities.”
Guardian - Downward spiral of war, crisis and need to worsen in 2020, fears top UN official


“The UN’s relief coordinator, Mark Lowcock, believes next year could be worse than a “terrible” 2019, when conflict, the climate emergency and economic desperation left 165 million people in need of aid. Extreme storms, drought and other disasters driven by the climate crisis hit the world’s poorest “first and worst”, Lowcock told the Guardian, with women, girls and those with disabilities the most badly affected. In an end of year interview in which Lowcock examined the challenges that lie ahead, he said Syria, southern Africa and Venezuela were on his “worry list” ....”

Social Science & Medicine - Stigma reduction interventions for children and adolescents in low- and middle-income countries: Systematic review of intervention strategies


“There is paucity in stigma reduction strategies for children in LMIC. Community strategies are significantly more applied for children than for adults. Intervention duration is significantly shorter for children than for adults. Stigma reduction interventions should target children both directly and indirectly. Interventions should address stigma beyond the scope of HIV/AIDS and mental health.”

Guardian – More than 200 members of Congress urge US supreme court to reconsider Roe v Wade


“More than two hundred members of Congress have urged the US supreme court to reconsider the landmark 1973 Roe v Wade ruling which legalized abortion nationwide. The appeal came in an amicus brief in a Louisiana case, and was signed by 205 Republicans and two Democrats, and calls on the high court to revisit the ruling, which affirmed that access to safe abortion is a constitutional right. It comes at a time when abortion rights in the US are increasingly under threat, and the issue is likely to become a point of fierce debate in the lead up to the 2020 US election....”

Lancet Letter – Lower trust in national government links to no history of vaccination

T Myachi et al; https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32686-8/fulltext
Vaccination is the most successful measure to improve public health; however, vaccine hesitancy is growing worldwide. WHO selected vaccine hesitancy as one of the top ten threats to global health. This phenomenon might be linked to public confidence in governments since vaccination is a public health intervention implemented by governments. Europeans' attitudes towards vaccination, as documented in the Eurobarometer survey, have been recently published by the European Commission. Here, we investigate the association between confidence in governments and the percentage of respondents who did not have vaccination in the past 5 years because of safety concerns, grouped by country.

Human resources for Health

Lancet Letter – Adapting workforce density threshold to WHO's new antenatal care recommendations


“A morning scene at the maternity outpatient waiting room of Chamawa First-Level Hospital in Lusaka, Zambia, struck me because of how overcrowded it was, with almost 100 pregnant women waiting to see one of the few doctors on duty. Anxiously, I imagined how the scene would change after the revision of the national antenatal care guidelines; how much busier will the doctors be? How much more congested will the waiting room be? And how well will the hospital keep functioning? WHO recommends, in its antenatal care guidelines, a minimum of eight antenatal care contacts as an intervention necessary to reduce perinatal mortality. In response to the launch of WHO's guidelines in 2016, an increasing number of countries raised the minimum number of antenatal care contacts from four to eight.”

“WHO should further revise the current threshold for density of health workers in response to the increase in the minimum number of antenatal care contacts. The two international norms (ie, minimum number of antenatal care contacts and threshold for density of health workers) published by WHO in 2016 are likely to be neither coordinated nor consistent.”

Access to medicines

FT - Extinction/Chinese medicine: diseconomies of scales

[https://www.ft.com/content/3b9eca83-20ff-4587-a51e-31be5af97cf8](https://www.ft.com/content/3b9eca83-20ff-4587-a51e-31be5af97cf8)

(gated) “China’s $60bn traditional medicine industry threatens wildlife and offers poor returns.”
Stat News - As families in Europe clamor for its pricey gene therapy, Novartis creates a lottery


We bet you picked this up from the media in the final days of December, Big Pharma’s version of the Hunger Games.

“Seeking to provide its pricey gene therapy to patients in countries where the drug is not yet approved, Novartis (NVS) has taken the unusual step of creating a lottery, a move that drew criticism from patient groups over concerns the approach would unfairly forsake some babies. At issue is access to Zolgensma, which costs $2.1 million per patient and is used to combat spinal muscular atrophy...”

See also the Guardian - Dismay at lottery for $2.1m drug to treat children with muscle-wasting disease.

Guardian - GSK puts faith in AI to make more successful drugs more quickly


“Firm is recruiting artificial intelligence specialists and developing new genomics lab.”

Scidev.net - Three tropical diseases targeted in push for new drugs


“An international consortium led by Brazilian researchers hopes to speed up the discovery of new drugs to be used in the treatment of malaria, visceral leishmaniasis, and Chagas disease....”
Guardian - Water-related violence rises globally in past decade


“Violence associated with water has surged in the past decade driven by attacks on civilian water systems in Syria’s civil war and increasing disputes over supplies in India, according to a comprehensive database of conflicts linked to the vital resource. Recorded incidents of water-related violence have more than doubled in the past 10 years compared with previous decades, the statistics maintained by the California-based Pacific Institute thinktank show…”

The Conversation - Protest has helped define the first two decades of the 21st century – here’s what’s next


Interesting analysis by F Ismail.

“The first two decades of the 21st century saw the return of mass movements to streets around the world. Partly a product of sinking confidence in mainstream politics, mass mobilisation has had a huge impact on both official politics and wider society, and protest has become the form of political expression to which millions of people turn. ... As we end a turbulent two decades of protest – the subject of much of my own teaching and ongoing research – what will be the shape of protest in the 2020s?...”

Bloomberg - The Middle Class Risks Consuming Itself

Bloomberg

Interesting ‘Economics’ column focusing on the US: “Health care and education employ a lot of people and sell services they increasingly can’t afford.”