

Preface

The Blackwell Companion to Medical Sociology is the first, truly global book reflecting the range of work taking place in medical sociology. Medical sociology, also referred to as health sociology or the sociology of health and illness, is a subdiscipline of sociology that has experienced tremendous growth worldwide. This growth began in the late 1940s when medical sociology first appeared on a systematic basis in the United States and then spread to other countries. Medical sociology has become one of the largest and most popular areas of sociology, but it also has multidisciplinary roots in medicine which have been important in its development. The growth of the field is seen in the numerous books, journals and journal articles, professional associations, and conferences devoted to the topic around the world. Consequently, it is time for a globally-oriented book to be published that expresses the work of the subdiscipline.

The term “medical sociology” is used in the title of this book because it is the traditional name of the field even though its work extends beyond medical practice to the entire social spectrum related to health and illness. The book itself consists of two parts – Substantive Topics and Regional Perspectives. The 26 chapters have been written by subject matter experts and residents of the particular countries and regions of the world being described. An exception is the chapter on the Arab world, written by Eugene Gallagher of the University of Kentucky, who is the foremost authority in the world on medical sociology in the Arab countries. Part I is concerned with substantive topics in medical sociology, generally like theory, culture, gender, and social stratification, while Part II deals with regional perspectives from the Americas, Western Europe, Russia and Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia and the Pacific Region.

Part I has nine chapters, which begins with my discussion of medical sociology and sociological theory. The evolution of theoretical thought in the field from

Talcott Parsons in the 1950s to the twenty-first century is reviewed and it is concluded that medical sociology is not atheoretical; on the contrary, it has a rich and diverse theoretical foundation. Chapter 2, by Stella Quah of the National University of Singapore, discusses the relevance of culture for health and reviews the research on this topic. Chapter 3, by Sarah Nettleton of the University of York in Great Britain, deals with an increasingly popular and promising new topic in medical sociology with a highly active theoretical discourse: the sociology of the body.

Next come chapters on health and social stratification, a basic subject, by Eero Lahelma of the University of Helsinki in Finland; women's health and gender, another central topic, by Sara Arber and Hilary Thomas of the University of Surrey in Great Britain; and two chapters on stress – one on the workplace by Johannes Siegrist of the University of Düsseldorf in Germany and the other on migration by Judith Shoval of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel. Part I concludes with chapters on health professions and occupations by Elianne Riska of Åbo Akademi University in Finland, and modern health systems by Fred Stevens of the University of Maastricht in The Netherlands. All of the contributors in Part I are medical sociologists and are on the faculties of their various universities.

Part II, on regional perspectives, begins with the section on the Americas, leading with a chapter on health care delivery in the United States by Bernice Pescosolido of Indiana University and Carol Boyer of Rutgers University. Next are chapters on the evolution of health care in Canada by B. Singh Bolaria and Harley D. Dickinson of the University of Saskatchewan, medical sociology in Mexico by Roberto Castro of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and social science and health in Brazil by Everardo Duarte Nuñez of Campinas State University in São Paulo.

The section on western Europe follows and includes chapters on medical sociology in Great Britain by Ellen Annandale of the University of Leicester and David Field of the Institute of Cancer Research in London; the French “paradox” concerning a rich diet and high life expectancy, along with a discussion of French health generally, health care, and health policy by Kristina Orfali of the University of Chicago; medical sociology in Germany by Olaf von dem Knesebeck and Johannes Siegrist of the University of Düsseldorf; and health and society in Sweden by Örjan Hemström of the University of Stockholm. These contributors are medical sociologists and most are university professors. Exceptions are David Field, who is a researcher at the Institute of Cancer Research in London and Kristina Orfali, a native of France, who currently serves as the Assistant Director of the MacLean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics at the University of Chicago.

Regional perspectives continue with a section on the health problems of Russia and eastern Europe, with a chapter on the health transition and medical sociology in Russia by Elena Dmitrieva of the Russian Naval Academy in St. Petersburg; the macrosocial context of health in Poland by Nina Ostrowska of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw; and the transformation of the health system in the Czech Republic by Hana Janečková of the Postgraduate Medical School in Prague. Dmitrieva is on

the faculty at the Nevsky Institute of Language and Culture in St. Petersburg, Russia, and is one of the country's new generation of medical sociologists, Ostrowska is the Deputy Director of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology in Warsaw, and Janečková is on the faculty at the School of Public Health in Prague's Postgraduate Medical School.

The section on Africa consists of a chapter by H. C. J. van Rensburg of the University of the Free State and Charles Ngwena of Vista University in South Africa. Van Rensburg is Director of the Centre for Health Systems Research and Development at the University of the Free State and Ngwena is on the law faculty at Vista University. Both schools are in Bloemfontein, South Africa.

The Middle East chapters on the Arab world are by Eugene Gallagher of the University of Kentucky and on health and health care in Israel by Ofra Anson of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

The book concludes with the section on Asia and the Pacific Region with chapters on medicine and health care in Australia by Deborah Lupton of Charles Sturt University in Bathurst; sociobehavioral factors in health and illness in Japan by Masahira Anesaki of the Nihon University School of Medicine in Tokyo and Tsunetsugu Munakata of the University of Tsukuba in Tsukuba, Japan; and the transformation of health care in the People's Republic of China by Meei-shia Chen of the National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan. All of these contributors are medical sociologists on the faculties of their respective institutions.

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