

“The Political Determinants of Health”

Racial Equity Book Club Discussion Questions – Tuesday, March 2

In this book, Daniel E. Dawes argues that political determinants of health create the social drivers—including poor environmental conditions, inadequate transportation, unsafe neighborhoods, and lack of healthy food options—that affect all other dynamics of health. By understanding these determinants, their origins, and their impact on the equitable distribution of opportunities and resources, we will be better equipped to develop and implement actionable solutions to close the health gap.

Discussion Questions

Discussion Breakout #1: Political Determinants Defined

1. The author spends a good bit of time describing the parable of the “Farmer and the Orchard.” What parallels did you draw from your own lived experience as a physician to the literary metaphor?
2. The author suggests, “the political determinants of health involve the systemic process of structural relationships, distributing resources, and administering power that shape opportunities that either advance health equity or exacerbate health inequities.” Thinking in terms of housing, transportation, access to food, and other main drivers that play a role in overall health, what political determinants do you see affecting the communities that you serve?

Discussion Breakout #2: Health Policy

3. The author contends that there are three major aspects that hinder or advance health equity: voting, government, and policy. In your opinion, which component seems most capable of greatest success and most challenging to fix? What barriers are standing in health advocates way?
4. The author takes us on a stroll through history by introducing us to several pieces of healthcare legislation and policies. Which legislative narrative had the most impact on you and why?
5. Why is policy based on politics instead of science and research even though our government funds research?

Discussion Breakout #3: Inequities are Systemic

6. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, public health has become part of the national conversation in ways that it has not been before. Disproportionate health affects of coronavirus on people of color, especially Black people. What upstream factors have contributed to this health disparity and how can public health play a role in improving outcomes among our minority populations? How has the COVID-19 pandemic provided a stress test for healthcare and its so-called safety net systems?
7. Systemic racism and privilege for a select group of people is baked so deeply into our American institutions that it is hard to identify their genesis. What unique opportunities do family physicians have to mobilize for bold action and realize a healthy, equitable and inclusive society?
8. What were the key take-aways that you felt were the most actionable from this book?