

472 Global Issues in Medicine

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WHY GLOBAL HEALTH?

Global health has emerged as an important field within medicine. Some scholars have defined global health as the field of study and practice concerned with improving the health of all people and achieving health equity worldwide, with an emphasis on addressing transnational problems. No single review can do much more than identify the leading problems in applying evidence-based medicine in settings of great poverty or across national boundaries. However, this is a moment of opportunity: only relatively recently have persistent calls for global health equity been matched by an unprecedented investment in addressing the health problems of poor people worldwide. To ensure that this opportunity is not wasted, we must strengthen health systems and improve health care delivery to address the true burden and distribution of disease. This chapter introduces the major international bodies that address health problems; identifies the more significant barriers to improving the health of people who to date have not, by and large, had access to modern medicine; and summarizes population-based data on the most common health problems faced by people living in poverty. Examining specific problems—notably HIV/AIDS ([Chap. 202](#)) but also tuberculosis ([Chap. 178](#)), malaria ([Chap. 224](#)), Ebola ([Chap. 210](#)), and key “noncommunicable” chronic diseases (NCDs)—helps sharpen the discussion of barriers to prevention, diagnosis, and care as well as the means of overcoming them. This chapter closes by discussing global health equity, drawing on notions of social justice that once were central to international public health but had fallen out of favor during the last decades of the twentieth century.