

On multidisciplinary research

Nancy Liu
(Scholar, 2008-09, Argentina)



A multidisciplinary group of researchers from IECS

"Multidisciplinary' is what everyone says but no one actually does."

The first presentation of our mini-orientation at Tulane University began on this weary note and perhaps without realizing it, I was nodding – an unspoken "That's the way it is," to the reality I often saw but in no way felt qualified to change.

Several of the world's most serious health problems are caused by a multiplicity of factors: poverty exacerbates health conditions like TB and limits access to appropriate care even though effective treatment exists. Mental health issues, like substance abuse, complicate the ugly web of risk behaviors, stigma, domestic violence, medication adherence, and (again) poverty associated with HIV/AIDS.

Yet we already know this.

The point is that few treatments adequately tackle this web in a multidisciplinary manner, often to the detriment of more innovative and effective strategies. Research and anecdotal evidence reveals, for example, that adherence to a medication regimen is delicately balanced on a steady source of income or status quo mental health functioning. A disruption to any of these can cause the precipitous cascade of an otherwise controllable illness. Still, most research continues to focus heavily on one dimension of a health problem that is acknowledged to be multidimensional.

But as a Fogarty Scholar at the Institute of Clinical Effectiveness and Health Policy

(IECS) in Buenos Aires, my foreign counterparts have provided me with a different model. This was evident from my first day, as we went around the room for introductions.

Hi, my name is Joaquín. I am an economist. The rest followed accordingly: Luz, a biostatistician. Nina, a sociologist. Agustina, an obstetrician. Ana María, a midwife. Tomás, an epidemiologist. Alejandro, a nurse. Not to mention the slew of adjunct legal experts, policy decision makers, microbiologists and anthropologists who flock through the doors for further research collaboration. Add in rich international collaboration, and what results is an environment fertile for the wellspring of new ideas.

Fellows 2009-2010

Argentina

Lisandro Colantonio
Guillermina Melendi