

Sol Levine and Jonathan Mann: we must hope that their influence will persist

Prof. Dieter Koch-Weser is retired chairman of the Department for Preventive and Social Medicine and Associate Dean for International Programs at Harvard Medical School

Anne Brunner's very perspective and sensitive interviews remind us of two men, whose premature deaths deprived us of their much needed influence on public health and health care. Both, Jonathan Mann and Sol Levine, in their own way and sphere of activities, succeeded in significantly changing the scope and image of public health by demonstrating and insisting that the social, and not strictly medical, causes of ill-health must be included in the practice and teaching of health care. They contributed to the acceptance of the World Health Organization's concept of health as "not only the absence of disease, but physical, mental and social well-being". And both, Jonathan Mann and Sol Levine, with their extraordinary teaching skills and persuasiveness, as well as with the strength of their personalities as role models, changed the outlook and even career of many of us, trained in the basic sciences and curative clinical medicine. They made us realise that to achieve good health for all in the United States and also in other countries one has to pay attention to overall quality-of-life, social conditions, and human rights. Both also were deeply concerned about the ever widening gap between the socio-economic and therewith health conditions in the poor and rich countries and also of the poor and rich people within all countries. They were profoundly human and humane.

Jonathan Mann in his lectures, in his writing, and during long stimulation conversations used frequently the word "connectedness". To him close relationships with other people, but also with his work and the causes he was fervently advocating, gave "meaning" – another favored expression in his rich vocabulary – to his life. And he certainly was a master in connecting easily and meaningfully to other individuals. The causes he chose as his life's work, the fight against the AIDS-pandemic and advocacy of human rights, are an indication of Jonathan Mann's deep concern for other human beings, particularly the neglected,

the underprivileged, and the underserved anywhere in the world. He early focussed on AIDS and developed a methodology to combat this incurable disease in Africa, where the social, cultural and health conditions were, and still are, the most unfavorable to achieve success. He realised that epidemiology and biostatistics are the prerequisite basic sciences for public health work and prepared thoroughly at the Harvard School of Public Health and the Community Disease Center in Atlanta before implementing his ideas in Kinshasa/Congo. Talking with some Congolese there and others, who worked with him, one hears again and again about his leadership ability, compassion, endurance, and adaptability to strange cultural and environmental conditions. – And the same is true for his work at the World Health Organization, following his stay in Africa, where he developed and headed the "Global Program on AIDS", after using his remarkable persuasiveness to convince that organisation to give AIDS prevention and care a high priority. During his work he became more and more appalled by the inhuman living conditions and infringements upon human rights throughout the world and after his return to the United States he devoted his efforts to found and direct the "Francois-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights" at the Harvard School of Public Health, where he, besides teaching and motivating numerous American and foreign students, became a widely heard voice in defense of human rights. He certainly was successful in integrating the concern for human rights into the teaching and practice of public health.

Sol Levine, a social and behavioural scientist, was not educated and trained in the medical sciences. Perhaps for just that reason his influence on public health teaching and, indirectly, health care was very significant, because he demonstrated the value or even the need of contributions from his field of expertise to the health sciences and practice. He was a prolific and excellent writer and a captivating

lecturer, who attracted faithful audiences, which not rarely had been initially sceptical. The clarity of his exposition, the choice of relevant cases and the lecturers humor and wit made him one of the favoured lecturers of the various schools, in which he was teaching. He was a great and successful advocate of prevention and of the mutual relationship between the social and health sciences. The academic departments of preventive and of social medicine owe him gratitude for his support, which raised their acceptance and academic prestige. Particularly rewarding were small group meetings, often individual conversations with Sol Levine, when he talked about the importance of the quality-of-life for health. He believed that the simple consciousness of being alive, of enjoying close relations-

ships, and feeling physically and mentally healthy create happiness, which in turn is a prerequisite for health. In a conversation about one year before his untimely death he expressed worry about the state of the world, about the deteriorating environment, the increasing poverty, the lack of development in most of the worlds countries, the escalating violence, all of these hindering the pursuit of this happiness. But even then he was still optimistic and felt that ultimately these hindrances would be overcome.

With the death of these two great and courageous men public health and social medicine has lost two strong and effective advocates and role models. We must hope that their influence will persist.

Dieter Koch-Weser MD, PhD



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