


# Climate Action in Medical Education

Preparing the next generation of physicians

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**Why should students  
and young physicians  
care?**



# Doctors as the natural change agents for the poor

## Public Health Matters

### Pathologies of Power: Rethinking Health and Human Rights

Paul Farmer, MD, PhD

Medicine and the allied health sciences have long been peripherally involved in work on human rights. Fifty years ago, the door to greater involvement was opened by Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which underlined social and economic rights: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."<sup>1</sup>

But the intervening decades have seen little progress in the press for social and economic rights, even though we may point with some pride to gains in civil or legal rights. That these distinctions are crucial is made clear by a visit to a Russian prison. The Russian Federation has traditionally been the United States' only serious competitor in the race to be the country with the highest rates of incarceration. With its current political and economic disruption, Russia has pulled ahead: some 700 per 100,000 citizens are currently in jail or prison. (In much of the rest of Europe, that figure is about one fifth as high.)

In the full-to-bursting pretrial detention centers in which hundreds of thousands of Russian detainees await due process, many fall ill with tuberculosis (TB). Convicted prisoners who are diagnosed with TB are sent to one of more than 50 "TB colonies." Imagine a Siberian prison in which the cells are as cramped as cattle cars, the fetid air thick with tubercle bacilli. Imagine a cell in which most of the prisoners are coughing and all are said to have active TB. Let the mean age of the inmates be less than 30 years. Finally, imagine that many of these young men are receiving ineffective therapy for their disease—given drug toxicity, worse than receiving placebo—even though they are the beneficiaries of directly observed therapy with first-line antituberculous agents, delivered by European

humanitarian organizations and their Russian colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

For many, the therapy is ineffective because the strains of TB that are epidemic within the prisons are resistant to the drugs being administered. Various observers, including some from international human rights organizations, have averred that these prisoners have "untreatable forms" of TB, even though treatment with the standard of care used elsewhere in Europe and in North America can cure the great majority of such cases.<sup>3</sup> TB has again become the leading cause of death among Russian prisoners—even among those receiving treatment. Similar situations may be found throughout the former Soviet Union.

Are human rights violated in this dismal scenario? Conventional views of human rights would lead one to focus on a single violation: prolonged pretrial detention, which currently has the accused detained for up to a year before making a court appearance. In many documented cases, young detainees died of prison-acquired TB before their cases ever went to trial. Such detention is in clear violation not only of Russian law, but of several human rights charters to which the country is signatory. And Russian and international human rights activists have indeed focused on this problem, demanding that all detainees be brought quickly to trial. An impasse is quickly reached when the underfunded Russian courts wearily respond that they are working as fast as they can. The Ministry of Justice agrees and is now inter-

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#### ABSTRACT

The field of health and human rights has grown quickly, but its boundaries have yet to be traced. Fifty-five years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, consensus regarding the most promising directions for the future is lacking; however, orientation-oriented assessments lead us to emphasize approaches that rely solely on recourse to formal legal and civil rights. Similarly unpromising are approaches that rely primarily on appeals to governments; careful study reveals that state power has been responsible for most human rights violations and that most violations are embodied in "structural violence"—social and economic inequities that determine who will be at risk for assaults and who will be shielded.

This article advances an agenda for research and action grounded in the struggle for social and economic rights, an agenda suited to public health and medicine, whose central contributions to future progress in human rights will be linked to the equitable distribution of the fruits of scientific advancement. Such an approach is in keeping with the Universal Declaration but runs counter to several of the reigning ideologies of public health, including those favoring efficacy over equity. (*Am J Public Health*. 1999;89:1486-1496)

# A complex issue:

“The world’s people face daunting challenges in the twenty-first century. While apologists herald the globalization of capitalism, many people on our planet experience recurring economic exploitation, immiseration, and environmental crises linked to capitalism’s spread. Across the globe social movements continue to raise the issues of social justice and democracy.”

Joe R. Feagin  
University of Florida

# Why do I care?

A personal anecdote...







# Chaguite

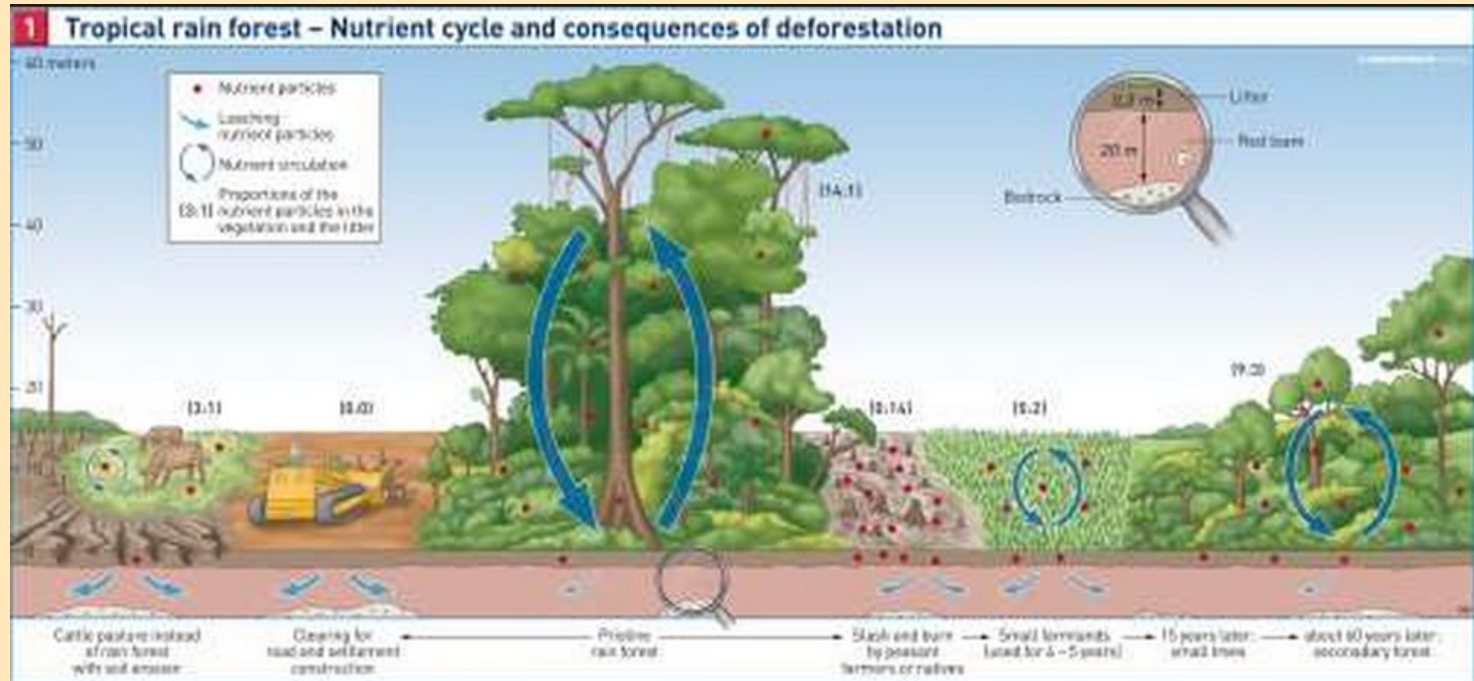


# Global Economy





# Trees can kill people?





**So, now what?**

April 18, 2017

# Medical Community Gathers Steam to Tackle Climate's Health Effects

M.J. Friedrich

## Article Information

*JAMA*. 2017;317(15):1511-1513. doi:10.1001/jama.2017.0969



# Some Ideas

- Collaborative research programs
- Integration into pre-clerkship curriculum
- Volunteering in local communities
- Medical school exchange programs
- Higher standards within our own hospitals

A scenic landscape photograph featuring a large, leafy tree in the foreground on the left side. The tree's branches extend across the top of the frame. In the background, a vast mountain range stretches across the horizon under a cloudy sky. The mountains are covered in dense green vegetation, and the overall atmosphere is serene and natural. The text "Thank you!" is centered in the middle of the image in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Thank you!**