

EDITORIAL FOREWORD

University of Liverpool Editorial Team

Editorial

We have been busy since the last Med Soc conference (and see the link for MedSoc 2010 <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/medsoc.htm>), preparing this issue to include the thought-provoking plenary given by Evan Willis, La Trobe University, entitled *Climate Change and Medical Sociology*. In this article for MSo, Evan draws attention to the current lack of engagement by sociologists in this pressing global issue, emphasising the scope for medical sociologists to become involved, and setting out a possible research agenda for the foreseeable future. One of the theoretical contributions that sociologists have made to understanding social and cultural responses to climate change has been the development of ideas around risk. In his article *Knowledge, substance use and gender differences associated with HIV infection risk among youth in a South African township* William DeJanes uses a quantitative methodology to explore understandings of risk and 'risky behavioural practices' with adolescents living in a large Black/African township in the Western Cape, South Africa. Despite the high potential for young people to become infected with the HIV virus, DeJanes found evidence of relatively high rates of sexual activity with multiple partners, linked to a low to moderate knowledge about HIV infection. Other findings include potentially socio-culturally specific gender disparities, with more girls reporting symptoms of sexually transmitted infections, linked to reported pressures to have sex and having sex in exchange for gifts. The picture DeJanes presents strongly suggests that current efforts to prevent the spread of HIV infection among some of the poorest people are largely ineffective, although the potential to use schools and parents/guardians to do more could provide the way forward.

Two papers explore aspects of medical education, both highlighting the need for more social scientific research in this important area. In his article, *the Changing Medical Regulatory Context: Focusing on Doctors' Educational Practices*, Martin Chamberlain reviews the potential for sociologists to explore how the recent changes designed to regulate medical practice in the UK have impacted on the actual behaviour of doctors. He presents the historical context to the current changes, to which practising clinicians have to adhere. Chamberlain argues that agencies of the state and the medical profession have enrolled rationalistic-bureaucratic systems in response to recent examples of professional abuse of patients, such as the Shipman case. From a sociological perspective, the introduction of these systems are interesting as they open up questions about how professions retain their dominance and, crucially, critique self-regulation. In *Exploring the Role of Discourse in Undergraduate Medical Training*, Subhashis Basu and Christopher Roberts report on a research study in which they used a discourse analytic approach to examine how undergraduate medical students experience their medical education in practice. They contrast these experiences with the formal 'mission statement' for undergraduate medical education contained in the General Medical Council's document 'Tomorrow's Doctors'. They conclude that new models of medical education are needed, based on the development of shared understandings and goals rather than the 'top-down' approach that currently prevails, but that for these to be developed more attention needs to be paid to the operation of power and ideology in the medical education system.

The Opinion Piece by Carl May and response by Bie Nio Ong make us think big, make us think about the point of what we do. Carl's paper discusses the challenges and the uses and misuses of Grounded Theory and the territorial issues between medical sociology and science and technology studies. But most importantly the Opinion Piece raises the question of how it is that theory is developed. How do we as sociologists working in health and illness make our studies

contribute to something bigger than themselves?

If you have any comments about this edition or would like to contribute to the publication, please email the editorial team on MSo@liverpool.ac.uk. If you would like to submit an article for peer-review to Medical Sociology online, please use the link:

<http://www.medicalsociologyonline.org/submissions.html>

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