Social Inequality and Its Effect on Emerging Infectious Diseases
Taylor Cressman

Rates of many diseases can vary based on biological factors and inheritable characteristics; however, explanation for infectious diseases exists in disease rates among varying racial and socioeconomic groups. While some of these factors are individual choices, all of them are socioeconomic such as gender, race, income, environment and education. If the primary health problems facing the world were based on the public announcements made by authorities and media coverage, one would believe this to be the epidemics and pandemics of infectious diseases. However, the primary health problem facing the world is the absence of health equity, a situation where unfair or unjust differences in health status are not present. These inequalities result from inequalities in living conditions that reflect power imbalances in society. People living in poverty are less able to afford healthy food, necessary protective measures and medical care. Low-income individuals tend to also face greater stress which can lower an immune system. Race is a strong determinant of disease rates, because racial minorities make up a large portion of the lowest social level. The health of the individual is best ensured by maintaining or improving the health of the entire community. Improving the quality and access to social health promoting social determinants of health is a key of creating health equity.

Inequalities have powerfully sculpted the distribution of infectious diseases and the course of disease in those that are affected. Growing inequalities in income and wealth have been created not only in developing economies but also in developed economies, including the United States. Nations with higher income inequality have worse health outcomes due to weaker social and health infrastructure. Concerns about income and wealth inequality and their effects on equity directs attention to identifying the barriers experienced on the basis of social class, gender, race, and disability. Those most at risk for emerging infectious diseases usually do not have the benefit of cutting-edge scientific knowledge. Travel is a potent force in disease spread and battle. This is because even though infections can pass easily across social and geographic borders, resources are often blocked. Many political borders serve as membranes, open to diseases and yet closed to the movement of cures.