

A Theoretical Framework on International Voluntary Health Networks

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Abstract : Trans-national and tropical medicine, historically associated with colonial power and missionary activity, is now central to discourses of global health and development, thrust into mainstream media by events like the 2014 Ebola crisis and enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals. Research in this area remains primarily the province of health professional disciplines, and tends to be framed within a simple North-to-South model of development. The continued role of voluntary work in this field is bound up with a rhetoric of partnering and partnership. We propose, instead, the idea of International Voluntary Health Networks (IVHNs) as a means to de-centre global-North institutions in these debates. Drawing on our empirical work with IVHNs in countries both North and South, we explore geographical and sociological theories for mapping the multiple spatial and conceptual dynamics of power manifested in these phenomena. We make a radical break from conventional views of health as a de-politicised symptom or corollary of social development. In studying health work as it crosses between cultures and contexts, we demonstrate the inextricably political nature of health and health work everywhere.

Keywords : development, global health, power, volunteering

Conference Title : ICSHI 2017 : International Conference on Sociology of Health and Illness

Conference Location : Venice, Italy

Conference Dates : June 21-22, 2017