The Intersection of Migration and Health

Migration plays a fundamental part in today’s economy. As migration increases all over the country, so do the health problems of these individuals. Migrants usually come from third-world countries where poverty and illness are mostly profound. Not only do poor living conditions affect migrants’ health but also their labor conditions. So, should it be a primary concern to all Americans? The answer is YES because immigrants have become a large part of our society. Americans should be concerned for these individuals’ health in order to prevent the spread of diseases such as AIDS, HIV, and tuberculosis to the general population. Although there is health policies covering immigrants to in extent, barriers to health access are still present affecting immigrants health conditions. So, in order to prevent this problem, society must provide stronger health services and promote healthier lifestyles to the immigrant community.

Humanity has migrated to every possible corner of the world. Homo Sapiens were the first group of humans to venture out of Africa into the unknown world—settle into the Middle East, Southern Asia, and eventually Australia, 85,000 years ago (“The History of Human Migration”). Back then, humans migrate for the simple reason of survival—escaping harsh climate changes. Now humans are still migrating in order to survive but due to political, economical, and educational reasons. Migrants are only in the search for a better life for them and their love ones. According to World Health Organization, “three percent of the world population are migrants” (46). Migration has been for several ages a worldwide phenomenon with diverse and complexity being fundamentals to migratory patterns. Migration has influence the structures of societies, families, and communities throughout the world (World Health Organization pg 46). There are many reasons why migrants decide to move from their homeland. One of the reasons is for jobs which will help them provide a better lifestyle for their families; another important reason is for education. They want to expand their knowledge and
experience quality learning that their country may not offer. Others simply migrate to escape war or other dangerous situations like crime.

Once migrants pass the obstacles of traveling to a new foreign country they are welcome with more barriers. These problems include language, cultural, socio-economic, and legal matters. With that in mind, health policies have been restrictively applied to immigrants all over the seven continents. In the United States the Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 forces both federal and state to limit services to undocumented immigrants (Kullgren). Many view this policy as a tool to reduce illegal immigration, protecting the public and its services. Not realizing that it opens doors to dangerous communicable diseases, which in the long run, it could affect whole communities’ health costing more lives and money. Health services should never be limited to any individual. According to Richard Jones, Sheriff of Butler Country in Ohio states that “illegal immigrants are taking benefits away from true Americans. The more public services offer to these individuals for free, [the more it] will only lead to more migration. These services were meant for American Citizens” (ProCon.org). Flavia Mercado, a pediatrician in Georgia said, “As an American Citizen I understand that you want to make sure the resources are there for the right people, yet, how deny someone health access? If we don’t treat and prevent illness […] our whole community is going to suffer” (Okie). Illegal immigrants are not taking any ones resources or services because of their fear of being sent back to their native countries, this only prolongs their health conditions. Even though illegal immigrants have violated the law by sneaking in and staying in a country that is not theirs, they should not have to pay with their health. Why should public health benefits be categorized instead of universal to every human being? Aren’t we all the same species?

From a global perspective there are key challenges that influence a public health for all humanity. These factors include unstable or no governments, poverty, dysfunctional health services, disease control programmes, and ongoing conflicts that reduce access to already establish services. Restrictions to health care towards any group of migrants are not only seen in the United States, but also through other countries. For example the United Kingdom restricted access to free health services to any group of immigrants in order to stop the entrance of immigrants which are only seeking to receive
free medical treatment (Overcoming Migrants' Barriers to Health). There is very little evidence reflecting that free public health services lure migrations. All countries should focus their efforts in prompting health and the well-being of immigrants. The government of every country should deliver health care to immigrant communities which are faced with severe illness. Health services should not be culturally or socially inclusive, but should apply to all humans. When it comes to health there should be no borders, restrictions, nor limitations. “Health is far more than just the absence of disease, rather it is a ‘state of physical, mental, and social well-being’ of migrants” (World Health Organization pg. 46). All countries should link migration and health as global public health issue that needs to be solved. There is a need to aware the importance health care policies not only national, but also international levels. Infectious diseases do not respect color, race, or country from spreading serious disease to highly mobile environments. The general population is at risk when migrant populations have communicable infectious illnesses that can easily spread from one person to another. According to Dr. Kullgren, “Limiting undocumented immigrants’ access to health services weakens efforts to fight the spread of communicable diseases among the general population [...] conditions such as tuberculosis are not always easily detected as communicable diseases.” (Kullgren pg. 1632) Many diseases are not identified by the symptoms that can be seen by the naked eye but by patients who seek medical help. Therefore, we should not just help immigrants when it is an emergency level but promote regular checks—delaying the breakout of dangerous diseases. Migrants’ perspectives towards health have always been negative, fearing that if they visit a hospital or clinic their illegal status would be reveal and no service would be offered and may even be deported to their native countries. According to Dr. Okie:

For recent immigrants — especially the estimated 12 million who are here illegally — seeking health care often involves daunting encounters with a fragmented, bewildering, and hostile system. The reason most immigrants come here is to work and earn money; on average, they are younger and healthier than native-born Americans, and they tend to avoid going to the doctor. Many work for employers who offer no health insurance, and they can not afford insurance premiums or medical care. (Okie)
Fear of being sent back to their homeland is not the only obstacle that handicaps immigrants to access health care; Money, language and cultural aspects also influence their fear to not seek medical assistance. Since they do not feel comfortable with the language they tend to not go to clinics because they feel neglected. This fear is present in an immigrant’s mind because they can not communicate one on one with their doctors or nurses about their worries that concern their health condition. Many times migrants only seek medical help when an emergency, but they do not tend to visit the doctor’s office for regular exams or yearly check ups. The circumstance that immigrants enter the country, and the conditions many of them live once in, cause an increase in poor health. In order to provide appropriate health services, including access to basic, emergency, or specialized resources, immigrants have to overcome many personal, structural and financial barriers.

According to Dr. Kullgren, “The consequences of immigrants’ health burdens and barriers to accessing services extend beyond the individual to the entire community.”(Kullgren pg.1630) So why should we Care? It benefits both communities and society at large. Migrants have a right to health. It promotes peace and security—stabilizing society. In James Dwyer article he states that “illegal immigrants are social member.”(Dwyer pg. 40) In addition, immigrants may not be citizens or legal residents; they are valuable employees, friends, neighbors, parents, and active individuals in communities. According to Dr. Mercado, “media reports regularly blame illegal immigrants for the worsening problems of the state’s health care system.” (Okie) The high rise of health care cost and reduction of access to health services have anger and contribute to anti-immigrant feels among American Citizens. However, Americans must know it is not immigrants fault but our health care system. Appreciate