Health Disparities and Social/Structural Determinants of Health

Michael S. Sinha, MD, JD, MPH
Adjunct Faculty, Northeastern University School of Law
Visiting Scholar, NUSL Center for Health Policy and Law
Research Fellow, Harvard-MIT Center for Regulatory Science
Affiliated Researcher, Program On Regulation, Therapeutics, And Law (PORTAL)
Teaching Faculty, Harvard Medical School Center for Bioethics
Lecturer, Department of Health Sciences, California State University, East Bay

Syllabus

• Updated syllabus online is SUBJECT TO CHANGE!
• Class 3 slides now posted (titles are hyperlinked)
• Public Comment and Final Paper details posted


Final Paper

• 16-18 pages in length, BlueBook footnotes. (50% of grade)
• Topic approval deadline is TODAY
• A proposal outlining the topic significance, key questions, expected outcomes and preliminary sources will be due before class on Wednesday, June 9, 2021
• Instructions and sample proposal now posted to the syllabus page
  • Model your proposal on the SAMPLE!
  • The final paper will be due by 3pm on Tuesday, August 24, 2021

Public Comment Brief

• Topic: “Phased Approach to the Resumption of Cruise Ship Passenger Operations 2021-09094” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
• Review the docket announcement and related materials for a Proposed Rule. Consult relevant legal, regulatory, and public health material to educate yourself about the context and implications for the proposed action.
• A structured “public comment” brief (6-8 pages) will be submitted to the agency by midnight on Wednesday, June 30, 2021 (25% of grade)
• A draft is due to me in Word format by June 16th so I can provide feedback before submission!
• Instructions are now posted on the syllabus page

• Framework for public comment:
  • Executive Summary (250 words max, not counted toward page max): stating your position on the issues presented in the docket notice, major supporting arguments and evidence, and recommendations.
  • Background: (1-2 pages) Brief overview of the evolution and current state.
  • Analysis: (1-2 pages) Your position and its rationale, including which stakeholders’ interests you are seeking to protect and how.
  • Actions Recommended: (1-2 pages) state the recommended course of action and what action steps would be needed to accomplish it.
  • Tables and Figures (optional, with attribution)
  • Footnotes (no formatting required)

Background and Holding

• W.E.B. DuBois noted in 1906 that social conditions, not genetics, impacted the health of Black people, causing racial disparities in mortality.
• In 2010, the US Government formally recognized that social determinants of health (SDoH) produce racial disparities.
• Racial disparities cost the US $175 billion in lost life years and $135 billion per year in excess health care costs and untapped productivity.
• “Structural racism describes the way our systems are structured to produce racial inequalities between whites and racial and ethnic minorities in the SDoH, leading to racial health disparities.”

Now apply this to COVID-19
Structural Racism

- Where do we go from here?
- How can we move from institutional statements to action?
- Where does public health law fit into this discussion?

15 Minute Break

#PHLaw on Twitter

- Engage with course materials and current topics in patent law and policy by joining the conversation on Twitter!
- Counts toward participation!
- Be sure to tag the following in your tweets:
  - @DrSinhaEsq
  - #PHLaw
- Optional additional tags: @PHLawWatch, @PHUR_Temple, @NetworkForPHL, #PublicHealthLaw, #LawTwitter
- Student tweets will be highlighted at the beginning of each class
- If you want help getting started on Twitter, schedule time during office hours
• "going into this interview, I didn’t understand the concept"
• "given that racism is illegal, how can it be so embedded in society that it is considered structural?"
• "as a child of the 60s, I didn’t get it…"
• "In today’s JAMA podcast, we discuss 'structural racism for skeptics'"
• "I think the term ‘racism’ might be hurting us … invoking feelings amongst people … that are negative"
• "I don’t feel I’m a racist … my parents taught me never to hate based on what people’s colors are … so I grew up kind of anti-racist"
• "Structural racism is an unfortunate term … personally, I think taking racism out of the equation would help"
Structural Racism

• Where do we go from here?
• How can we move from institutional statements to action?
• Where does public health law fit into this discussion?

#PHLaw Anti-Racism Action Plan

• For the next 20 minutes, you will meet in small groups to operationalize many of the principles we’ve discussed today, as they pertain to obtaining a legal education
• You will do three things:
  • Identify obstacles related to social/structural determinants of health (including racism) in three different time periods:
    • Pre-law
    • Law school
    • Post-graduation
  • Identify the underlying forces that shape those disparities
  • Propose strategies for mitigating or eliminating those disparities

Discussion: Part 1

• In larger groups, your task will be to situate yourself in leadership at one of three organizations:
  • A law school (not necessarily NUSL)
  • Association of American Law Schools (accrediting body)
  • American Bar Association (membership/advocacy)
• Develop a meaningful and comprehensive anti-racism action plan for each organization
• Each group will have its own (NEW) Google doc (linked on the syllabus page)
• Fill in the appropriate blanks, and be prepared to discuss with the class
Discussion: Part 2

Additional Resources:

- Boston University Center for Antiracist Research: https://www.bu.edu/antiracism-center/
- Health In Justice Action Lab, NUSL: https://www.healthinjustice.org/
- Law Deans Antiracist Clearinghouse Project: https://www.aals.org/antiracist-clearinghouse/
- Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law, NYU School of Law: https://www.law.nyu.edu/centers/race-inequality-law

Any questions?