

From the Editor-in-Chief

This issue of World Health & Population presents three research papers that should be of great interest to our readers. The original papers have all been published online by WHP during the last quarter and are selected here as representative of recent outstanding contributions to the journal. Interestingly, these three, quite different, papers share a common theme around information needs.

The first paper, “Measuring Progress toward the Millennium Development Goals and the Missing Millions,” by Roy Carr-Hill, calls attention to measurement issues around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We are rapidly approaching the target date of 2015 for achieving the MDGs, and commentaries are proliferating about progress, lack of progress, needs for better progress, etc. Carr-Hill takes us back to the foundation for making any assessments: the data behind them. In particular he is critical of using household surveys as the basis for data collection, noting the numerous ways the “poorest of the poor” can be missed in such an approach. It is likely the case, as Carr-Hill contends, that policy makers at the country and international level are underestimating those at risk in the MDGs, and there are likely “missing millions,” in particular among the poorest of the poor. Improved data systems in lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are, of course, necessary, but may unfortunately remain a lower-ranked priority competing with other pressing needs.

Leah Zullig, Charles Muiruri and colleagues are the authors of the second article in this issue, “Cancer Registration Needs Assessment at a Tertiary Medical Centre in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania.” Picking up on the theme in this issue of data needs in LMICs, Zullig et al. did a survey to assess the readiness at a large academic medical centre in Tanzania to institute a cancer registry system. Although infectious disease remains the primary health threat in LMICs, chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes have also been increasing at alarming rates. Data systems across the board in these countries are generally inadequate and underfunded. Disease registries, which are known to improve diagnosis, care and outcomes, are virtually unknown. Before implementation of such a system, however, Zullig et al. have wisely assessed the organizational “readiness for change” to identify possible barriers, facilitators and needs at the institution.

Finally, “The Role of Developing Countries in Generating Cochrane Meta-analyses in the Field of Pediatrics (Neonatology and Neuropediatrics): A Systematic Analysis,” by Sascha Meyer, Christiane Willhelm et al., documents the paucity of evidence originating from LMICs in an area of medicine of critical importance to the health and development of these countries, and the target of the MDGs as well. Recognizing the fact that birthrates and perinatal, infant and child mortality are vastly higher in LMICs than in the less resource-constrained countries in Western Europe and North America, it is distressing that more research and possible approaches and solutions are not originating from the places most affected. Imported approaches may not be the most relevant or feasible; increased evidence around effective local approaches would be of great value.

In conclusion, we hope that you find the papers in this issue interesting and worthwhile, and that you will also consult others recently released online at www.worldhealthandpopulation.com. WHP remains committed to its mission to provide a forum for researchers and policy makers worldwide to publish and disseminate health- and population-related research, and to encourage applied research and policy analysis from diverse global and resource-constrained settings. WHP is indexed on MEDLINE and is accessible through PubMed.

We look forward to continued enthusiastic submission of manuscripts for consideration, peer review and publication. Finally, the editors and publishers of WHP are always interested in any comments or suggestions you might have on the papers or about the journal and our mission. Please feel free to write or e-mail us.

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