“Social” Determinants of Health

Gail R. Wilensky
Project HOPE
November 5, 2010
Non-Traditional Determinants of Health

...ing recognition that social or non-medical determinants of health are more important than medical determinants.

Yes --- access to medical care is important but ... so is income, education, economic opportunities, early childhood development, etc.
WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health

20 Commissioners from around the world

**Purpose:** Identify strategies that improve health, reduce health disparities

**Commission visits:** Chile, Egypt, India, Iran, Kenya, Brazil, China, Canada, U.S., Japan

**Observations:** Social determinants are important in *developing* countries but also in *developed* countries
Some of What WHO Commission Learned …

*Life expectancy* differences as great in developed world as in developing world

-- we know avg. life expectancy at birth in developing world is < developed world, e.g., *37 yrs.* in *Botswana* vs. *79 yrs.* in *Japan*, but …

-- *poorest males* in *Glasgow* have life expectancy of *54 yrs.* vs. *82 yrs.* for *high income males*

-- life expectancy of *African-American males* in *DC* is *63 yrs.* vs. *80 yrs.* for *white males* in *Montgomery County*
Major Recommendations of WHO Commission

♦ Improve daily living conditions
♦ Invest in early childhood development
♦ Make sure there are healthy places to live
♦ And decent places to work
♦ Recognize people need protection thru-out their life

Most important – Consider health effects from all legislation – not just health legislation
9 recommendations/3 categories

♦ Promoting early childhood development and health
♦ Promoting good nutrition
♦ Promoting healthy communities

Underscores notion that reforming healthcare is critical but …

Improving health requires improving social factors
Wilensky/Satcher Perspective …

Social determinants focus is especially important for children

♦ Many serious medical problems start in childhood
  -- reducing incidence and prevalence can have big payoffs

♦ Nutrition
  -- especially during pregnancy/early childhood

♦ Education
  -- important for early childhood development – esp. for poor kids

♦ substance abuse