DISPARITIES IN VISION HEALTH

Addressing cracks in access to and delivery of care.

LESSONS IN SCIENCE AND COMMITMENT

One of the deadliest diseases in history, smallpox is estimated to have killed more than 300 million people in the 20th century. In 1965, a massive international campaign was launched by the World Health Organization to eradicate the disease. Endemic countries were supplied with vaccines and kits for collecting and sending specimens, and the implementation of the bifurcated needle further facilitated vaccination efforts. Substantial donations were contributed, with the annual cost of the campaign estimated to be $23 million from 1967 to 1979. Ultimately, the last endemic case of smallpox was recorded in 1977, and in 1980 the World Health Assembly declared that smallpox was the first disease to be eradicated.

The eradication of smallpox is regarded as one of the greatest scientific and humanitarian achievements of all time. It drove subsequent vaccination campaigns and strengthened routine immunization programs. But it also illustrated the complexities of cooperation and the need for political commitment to a health goal. It showed that technological advances are essential, but so is a strategy for their adoption and use. It stressed the importance of acknowledging how different populations are affected by a universal problem and the need to tailor solutions accordingly. Although the smallpox vaccine was discovered in 1796, it took many years and many lessons before the disease could be fully addressed.

The number of individuals who are affected by visual impairment and blindness is growing substantially. In an increasingly connected world, health problems have far-reaching effects. In this issue of *GT*, contributors address some of the disparities affecting patients with glaucoma in the United States and abroad. As they note, new solutions are helping us to better observe, assess, and understand the differences in access to and delivery of care, but a comprehensive effort is needed to truly address them. Introspection, adaptation, and collaboration will be required. Good science alone is insufficient without commitment to its application. ■

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