Re: Social Justice as the Moral Core of Family Medicine: A Perspective from the Keystone IV Conference

To the Editor: Steven Schroeder, in “Social Justice as the Moral Core of Family Medicine: A Perspective from the Keystone IV Conference,” (J Am Board Fam Med July-August 2016 29:S69-S71; doi:10.3122/jabfm.2016.S1.160110) highlights social justice as a recurring conference theme and promotes 5 steps for public action that include “speak out on the important social and moral issues” and “make common cause with potential allies.” As a former public health officer for Madison-Dane County, Wisconsin and San Antonio-Bexar County, Texas, I can affirm that both the University of Wisconsin and University of Texas family medicine programs have spoken out, taken action, and worked effectively with local public health to further social justice in very real ways. The 2 exemplary programs, led by Dr. Valerie Gilchrist (previously Dr. John Frey) and Dr. Carlos Jaen are shining examples of what can be accomplished when family medicine and public health work together as allies.

Addressing excessive black infant mortality, University of Wisconsin Family Medicine and Public Health Madison–Dane County collaborated on research, advocacy, and clinical practice to address a grave social injustice and, in turn, contribute to real change. Over a period of several years, local black infant mortality rates, which had for decades been approximately 3 times white rates, were decreased to near parity.1 In San Antonio, where the crushing burdens of obesity and diabetes are especially severe among the majority Hispanic population, University of Texas Family Medicine and Public Health continued to be overlooked. Family medicine, with social justice at its core, should recognize that, in the words of Dr. David Satcher, US Surgeon General and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director, “social justice, in the application of scientific knowledge, is the philosophical base of public health.” Local public health is a natural ally for any family medicine program that seeks to measurably improve the health of the community. In practice, our 2 disciplines are beautifully complimentary. Our moral and philosophical core is the same.

Thomas Schlenker, MD, MPH
Department of Family and Community Medicine,
University of Texas Health Science Center of San Antonio,
San Antonio, TX
thomas.schlenker@interlexusa.com

References
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The above letter was referred to the author of the article in question, who offers the following reply.

Response: Re: Social Justice as the Moral Core of Family Medicine: A Perspective from the Keystone IV Conference

To the Editor: It is good to hear of these examples of collaboration between local public health agencies and family medicine. Given that the Keystone IV Conference focused on health care delivery issues, my “partial list” of potential allies for family medicine was limited to clinical disciplines. I fully agree with Dr. Schlenker that abundant opportunities to improve population health exist beyond those examples, including local public health agencies, state and federal government, advocacy groups, and many others.

Steven A. Schroeder, MD
Department of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco; Smoking Cessation Leadership Center, University of California, San Francisco, San Francisco, CA
E-mail: Steve.Schroeder@ucsf.edu.
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