

Health Care Concerns in Brazil

Although Brazil is considered the wealthiest country in South America, it is still struggling with its political system, education, living conditions, distribution of wealth, and more importantly health care; all of which are necessary in order to make a nation successful.

Traveling throughout the country of Brazil it is not easy to miss the obvious differences in the culture from that which I am normally used to. In fact, even the regions differ greatly from the north to the southeast and from the east coast to the west. Brazil is divided up into five distinct regions; south, southeast, northeast, central, and north, all of which illustrate the amount of inequality Brazil faces day to day. However, despite these sometimes major differences, as a whole Brazil is working towards transforming from a developing nation to that of a developed one. The country is doing this by attempting to take the necessary steps towards improving their current health care system as well as health care concerns.

From not living in an area or being that familiar with extreme levels of poverty, stepping into some areas in Brazil was a real eye opener. In fact, these areas of poverty were what drew me in to learn the most about, especially in terms of health care. How is it that a country which has almost thirty percent of its people living below the poverty line able to have a decent or even sufficient health care system? Furthermore, how can a country whose regions differ so greatly work together to achieve the same goals?

Changes in health care in Brazil date back to 1988 when the constitution was written, which introduced Brazil to its first free health care system. This was a big step for Brazil because it gave everyone the right and access to the health care they needed. Now, along with the public system, there is also a parallel private system, which provides different types of insurance policies. Although these systems exist, it does not guarantee that the health care services in Brazil are good.

While traveling to Rio De Janeiro and Sao Paulo, two of the wealthiest areas in Brazil, it is obvious that the lifestyle is much different from that experienced in the Amazon. However, Rio De Janeiro is also home to the numerous favelas which are known as some of the poorest places on earth. Here the presence of drug gangs is very high and when the police try to intervene, violence breaks out. The favelas are also home to problems such as alcohol abuse and tuberculosis. In this case keeping up with health care, let alone order, tends to be a struggle. However, the living conditions in the favelas are beginning to improve and this directly leads to improvements in health care. Improvements such as the introduction of brick houses, electricity, indoor plumbing, and sanitation are putting Brazil in the right direction to becoming a better nation. It is good to see that despite many of the troubles the people in Brazil may face they are still able to keep their heads up and be good spirited.



The favelas in Rio de Janeiro where residents have to deal with harsh living conditions.

Health care in areas such as the Amazon Rainforest are much scarcer than in cities such as Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasilia. This is because their access to health care is much more limited due to the location of where people live and given the fact boats are the main source of transportation. Therefore, health care professionals and centers are in strong demand in the Amazon regions. Many of the people living in the Amazon region live either on a house on the water or live in areas which require a long boat ride back to civilization. This makes receiving health care quickly and effectively even more difficult.



The people living in the Amazon are miles away from civilization as well as adequate health care.

One area of large concern to the people of Brazil is child's health care as well as fertility and woman's reproductive health. In fact, in recent years Brazil has made some of the necessary steps forward to improving the health of its children. The infant mortality rates are on a decline due to maternal education as well as a better access to healthcare. Another improvement that has been made is in the area of women's reproductive health. Most importantly is that fertility rates have declined dramatically going from 5.8 in 1970 to 2.3 in 1996, and surprisingly fertility rates in the northeast have even begun to decline. These lower fertility rates are also a large factor in the increase in children's health in Brazil.

However, as seen in other instances, the health care of children and infants in the northern part of the country is much worse and is improving at a slower rate than in other areas. This is not necessarily only because of economic reasons, in order to improve health in the northern region of the country better access to health care needs to be made.

available. In fact, advancements financed through the World Bank in the 1980's started to create projects in the northeastern region which built more facilities. Although this was taking a step in the right direction, it was not as successful as hoped and many of the facilities are now unutilized and lack good quality.

As a developing nation, endemics and disease continue to be a large issue of concern in Brazil. Most importantly AIDS and malaria are causing serious problems in Brazil. This was very evident as we traveled to Brazil because we were required to get malaria medicine before the trip and were constantly reminded every day to take our medication, especially since we spent three days in the Amazon Rainforest where mosquitoes carrying malaria are most prominent.

Because Brazil is a country with such a large number of its people living in poverty, the contraction and spread of disease due to living conditions and health care access is much more likely. Malaria is present mostly in jungle areas or places where mining and agriculture occur. Cases also come about due to the fact that people move daily or with the changing of the seasons making it much easier for the disease to circulate. However, in recent years Brazil has worked on creating the Brazil Amazon Basin Malaria Control project which is trying to reduce the presence of malaria to a level that is no longer considered a health problem. As Brazil moves closer and closer to becoming a developed nation, cases of malaria will be fewer and fewer.

As of 2003 there were 650,000 reported cases of AIDS and 15,000 deaths during that year. Currently, Brazil is attempting to work towards bringing that number down, but due to lack of funding and more important education about AIDS, this has become quite a difficult task. It is up to the country of Brazil as a whole to work together to overcome this devastating situation they find themselves in. In fact, Brazil has launched a National AIDS Prevention and Treatment program which although it is still in the early stages of development; it will hopefully make significant changes.

Health care is a big factor in the development of a country, as Brazil attempts to bring its people out of poverty and into education large changes in health care will be seen as well. As we experienced first hand though our time in Brazil, they realize they need to make changes in order to become a developed nation, they just need to implement the necessary programs for this to actually happen.

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