

DR. BARRY R. BLOOM'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PUBLIC HEALTH IN INDIA

Dr. Barry Bloom first visited India in 1969 as part of an Asian tour that also included Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan. He was confronted with the ravages of untreated leprosy for the first time while on this trip. Moved by what he saw, when he returned home he developed an animal model for one form of the disease in which the immune system kills the leprosy bacillus but damages nerves as innocent bystanders. Previously, while at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, he had discovered the first cytokine, non-antibody molecules by which lymphocytes and T cells influence the immunologic behavior of other body cells to fight infection.

As a result of his scientific discoveries, the World Health Organization (WHO) invited Dr. Bloom to a 1971 meeting in New Delhi to discuss modern scientific approaches to eliminating leprosy. This meeting resulted in three major WHO technical bulletins which formed the basis of the first research program at the WHO, on the Immunology of Leprosy (IMMLEP), which became a 'laboratory without walls' and the precursor for the WHO's Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases. During his tenure as Chair of the IMMLEP Committee at the WHO, Dr. Bloom was instrumental in enabling the extraordinary five-armed trial of different vaccines against leprosy, two developed in India, to be conducted in India.

In 1972 the WHO asked Dr. Bloom to return to India to teach the first course in Immunology in the country. The course brought students from all over India to the All India Institute for Medical Science (AIIMS, a premier teaching research hospital in New Delhi, India) for a summer of intensive training. This program was repeated for many years and trained a whole generation of Indian immunologists.

When he became Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health in 1999, Dr. Bloom felt the desire to give something back to India, which had been so influential in shaping his career in global health. Dr. Bloom arranged a meeting with Rajat Gupta, then Managing Director of McKinsey and Co., in September 2001 to discuss the creation of a first-rate school of public health, which was lacking in India. He also introduced Mr. Gupta to Dr. K. Srinath Reddy, the brilliant young Chair of Cardiology at AIIMS and physician to the Prime Minister of India, whom they asked to become President of what is now the fully realized Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). With the support of Mr. Gupta and McKinsey, and the Secretary of Health, Mr. Hota, and under the leadership of Dr. Reddy, support for the Foundation has since come from the government of India, the Gates Foundation, and an unanticipated outpouring from the private sector in India. Commitments have been made by nine states to create public health schools in their states, with three of them having already broken ground.

Dr. Bloom serves as Co-Chair of the Academic Advisory Committee of the PHFI and looks forward to helping engage the Harvard School of Public Health in training the leadership and faculties of the new schools. He has visited India many times in the 40 years since his first visit to lecture and attend meetings. In 2005, he brought many friends and alumni of the Harvard School of Public Health and Harvard University to India, where he and then Harvard President Larry Summers signed a Memorandum of Understanding committing Harvard to work together with the PHFI to strengthen public health in India.