

How can we treat others for an infection we are plagued with ourselves?

Julia Addison

Decolonising is not about actions taken hundreds of years ago. It is about actions that happened yesterday. Actions that are still happening today. For me, this reminder set the tone for the first edition of the annual Power of Knowledge conference, *Walking the Talk On Equitable Partnerships*. In the current work towards decolonising academia, we would all like to believe we are aiming to right the wrongs of our ancestors, rather than dismantling the ongoing colonial practices embedded in our current methods of knowledge dissemination and production. We would all like to believe that we are a part of the solution, rather than the problem. However, as a White, High-Income Country Global Health Masters graduate, to protest the claim that I am part of the problem would be a lie. The fact is, I am acting in a system that often perpetuates the very problems it attempts to tackle. Throughout the conference, I was plagued by the question: how can we target issues of discrimination, inequity and bias working within a system infected with these very same issues? How can we look at ourselves as researchers, as lecturers, as students, and treat a disease we are far from immune to? How can we, as the conference asks us to, walk the talk on equitable partnerships?

In working to become part of the solution, rather than the problem, we must recognise that the means towards knowledge production are as important as the end results. Ethical and equitable knowledge production and dissemination must go beyond the current standards of informed consent and doing no harm. We, as academics, must take a deep and critical look at our research team, our funding mechanisms, the problematic requirements of the grants we apply for, and the very means through which we value one piece of knowledge over another. As we work to gain knowledge to make a better world we must ask ourselves: whom does this knowledge benefit? Who wants these answers? Who is setting the agenda? Am I the right person to be conducting this research? What colonial past, or present, does this research embed itself within? These are only a few of the many questions we must ask ourselves before we embark on a project based only on good intentions.

Working in academia, I believe we often justify the actions we take in our thirst for knowledge with the intention that our publications will lead to eventual changes in policies

and practice. The benefit of these intended changes allows us to overlook the methods by which this knowledge was obtained. We pat ourselves on the back for doing the best we can and praise ourselves when someone from the country we are investigating is merely consulted during the formulation of a project. This needs to change! We need to stop accepting 'our best' or our 'good intentions' and *really* take accountability for the inequitable partnerships we are participating in today. Practices to promote equitable partnerships must become more than an aim or hope, they must become a *standard*. While there is no strict guide on how this can be done, we cannot pretend that there is not a wide breadth of knowledge available to us, examples of successes and pitfalls that we can learn from. The lack of any clear answer is no excuse to continue aimlessly down the road that we have always followed. To not attempt what may seem to some as an impossible feat to achieve in our lifetimes.

As I conclude this reflection, I remember one of the primary questions I was left with following this conference: how can we actually hold people accountable to their statements of equity and decolonisation? What kinds of incentives, what kinds of consequences, can we put in place to push for the changes we need? I wish I could guarantee that '*walking the talk on equitable partnerships*' would go beyond the discussions held at this conference. However, I recognise that the only person whose actions I can truly control, the only person I can really hold accountable, is myself. I can only hope that my colleagues do the same and that together, we go beyond words and into actions. As was suggested by one of the keynote speakers, Dr. Zuleika Bibi Sheik, we must redefine how we think of success in academia and even in life, not in grants and awards, but in our peers living their lives in dignity.