

Power and the Feeling of Powerlessness

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The following words express my personal opinion and are reflecting on the Power of Knowledge Symposium (1st of September 2022, Amsterdam)

After visiting the Power of Knowledge Symposium, I felt tired. But positively. My body molecules and synapses were firing after experiencing talks, music and dance. Questions I was repeating in my head got answered, and new ones arose. I was uncomfortably thrown back to situations at my clinical working place. This, of course, was a small-scale problem but representative of how a lack of fair education can leave people feeling powerless. Once more, I learned during the symposium to put different pieces together to open up another dimension.

I worked for four years in a big hospital as a medical doctor for Anaesthesia and Intensive care in Berlin. Our team leaders failed to share knowledge and teach the resident doctors, regardless of backgrounds or accents. Many of my colleagues felt they do not learn and work in a safe environment. Those individuals speaking up and trying to change the situation did not get the support of our residency representatives. The latter set an agenda to get “*better and structured training for residencies*”. But who sets this agenda? And why is aiming for non-discrimination and non-violent communication a stumbling block in reaching good education for all? The group of residencies that defined the priorities was not representative. I left the team without following my value, without speaking up against injustice and an unfair system.

Studying Global Health makes me feel like I am going through a metamorphosis. I experience restricted views changing and the disillusion of a never changing static systems transmuting. I am thankful to learn from a vibrant global community that aims for change and is passionately determined. One of the questions that touched me most during the symposium is HOW TO BECOME A TRUE ALLY? What can we do to ensure more “*disciplined plurality*” in Global Health?

I feel the answer is so simple, it almost hurts. Maybe this is also the reason why humanity, or let's say the wealthiest 10% of society, refuse to accept this solution. The answer is to go

from more to less. Less consumption, less exploitation and fewer power imbalances. The concept of “*exponential growth*” is a disaster. Everyone knows that disasters cost life and cause trauma. Moreover, exponential growth prevents the majority of humans and our planet from thriving. I support Dr Zuleika Bibi Sheik in saying that we all must reframe success into a state of creating social value rather than measuring performance. In one of my master's courses, we discussed that the poorest of the world still own a fortune together, and the health sector in many parts of the world is a blue ocean to explore. Together we can define how social businesses are designed to make sure that people thrive and live in dignity. But this can only be successful when the Power of Knowledge is distributed equitably, and we start to think about investment and funding radically differently.

For me, it is evenly essential not to stagnate out of fear of failing or a moment of feeling powerless. No one can be perfect or impactful continuously. But once we receive knowledge and embody power, it can not be taken away. We can learn and adjust. And the true magic happens not when we do “*business as usual*” and sit in our comfort zone, talking to the same people we used to for years. Transformation happens at the edge when we feel the discomfort and contemplate it. It is vital to share that everyone has power and can have an impact. This is a message I would like to share in my future.

On a large scale, the urge for global climate action inherits a moment to show true allyship. Unfortunately, framing “*shared responsibility in climate change adaption*” currently stops us from gaining momentum. Maybe we have a colossal confusion around the concepts of equity and equality. Perhaps people of power are not willing to share their leading positions. Both are likely to be true. But, where we aim for *equality* at the endpoint, we cannot reach it without *equity* – *not in Global Health* and not in *climate change adaptation*. Where we look is where we go. So, it is crucial to focus on where exactly we want to go - together! Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, just announced for his billion-dollar enterprise: “*Earth is now our only shareholder*”. He aims to transform all profit into social value and support grassroots communities at scale.

Looking back on the situation in my hospital, I see what our young professional team would have needed. It is similar to the output we had in our workshops at the Power of Knowledge Symposium. They seem essential at a small scale as they are crucial for a system change: a safe space to share thoughts, exchange criticism and discuss sustainable solutions. In my

former team, the lack of opportunities to connect within the team and the lack of shared knowledge automatically set one part on stage and the rest on the back ranks. What strikes me the most is that the lack of safe spaces seems to matter to those who experience it but not necessarily to those in power. We have to keep this in mind. Even further, I think this message cannot be repeated enough. To learn, grow and transform, we need safe spaces. To me, The Power of Knowledge Symposium created one.