

JOURNAL

of Health Inequalities

Dear Colleagues,

We are proud to launch the second issue of the *Journal of Health Inequalities*. On 6 May 2016, the Higher Vocational State School in Kalisz, represented by the Provost Prof. Jan Chajda, and the Chancellor Kazimierz Matusiak, signed a collaboration agreement with the Health Promotion Foundation, represented by its President Prof. Witold Zatoński, with the intention of establishing the European Observatory of Health Inequalities. The *Journal of Health Inequalities* is still in the first year of its activity, but it is our hope that our English-language scientific periodical will become one of the main instruments of the Observatory. The journal is devoted to the problems surrounding population health, and the key drivers shaping it, in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and in Russia and the post-Soviet states, and to broader issues of global public health.

On one hand, the rapid health improvement in certain CEE countries could be deemed a great public health success of the last twenty-five years. In this issue we present several articles looking in detail at the case of Poland, a country in which smoking rates have halved in this period¹, and which in the 1990s had one of the fastest levels of health gain in the world². However, the countries of Western Europe continue to be a moving target for public health efforts in CEE. As another article in this issue shows, while daily smoking among children in Poland has halved to 10% in the last decades, Norway in the same period has managed to foster the first almost completely tobacco-free generation, as smoking rates among its children are close to zero³.

Health inequalities, which lie at the heart of this journal's interests, remain the single most significant factor dividing Europe and the European population. In some countries, most evidently Russia and a number of other post-Soviet republics, the health gap dividing them from the West is still increasing. In the western half of Europe premature mortality before the age of 65 has fallen to single-digit levels. In the eastern half, in several countries half of all men die before 65. If policymakers and public health experts are serious about continuing the harmonization of Europe, further steps need to be taken towards narrowing this gap. We analyse these health disparities within Europe in the introductory article, *Premature mortality: Europe's persisting Iron Curtain?*⁴.

Andrzej Wojtyła, Witold Zatoński

¹The significance and impact of the Polish Anti-tobacco Law (pages 32-35)

²Democracy is healthier – health in Poland in the late 1980s and 1990s (pages 17-24)

³Trends in smoking among Polish and Norwegian youth 1986-2014 (pages 44-51)

⁴Premature mortality: Europe's persisting Iron Curtain? (pages 3-6)