

JOURNAL

of Health Inequalities

Dear Colleagues,

Since the last issue of the *Journal of Health Inequalities*, the world of public health has been dominated by news of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first phase of the pandemic we have seen countries of Central and Eastern Europe stop the spread of the disease more successfully than many of the wealthier, better organised and administered countries of Western Europe. However, the situation has changed in the autumn, with the health systems of countries such as Poland bending under the weight of the pandemic.

We are pleased to present to our readers an article by one of the leading European public health scholars, Professor Martin McKee from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, in which he analyses the constituent parts of the more and less successful responses to COVID-19 around the world. The article is based on Professor McKee's inaugural lecture given at our partner institution – Calisia University. It is accompanied by a profile of Professor McKee, with a focus on his involvement in research and training of scientists in Central and Eastern Europe.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is not the only challenge facing public health in Europe.

Poland, in particular, after a period of rapid health gain in the 1990s, since 2003 has been experiencing a stagnation in life expectancy growth, which in the recent years has turned into a health recession. This has been largely down to the toll man-made diseases have been taking on the health of Poles. Małgorzata Pikala *et al.* describe the consequences of alcoholic liver disease on the Polish population, with a view on the educational inequalities in mortality from this condition. The problem of alcohol consumption in the country deteriorated since 2003, with the weakening of alcohol control measures in the country and a marketing offensive of the alcohol industry.

A series of commentaries by leading Polish researchers, doctors, and scientists, explores the problem of pollution, in reference to the article by Professor Jonatan Samet and Meghan Buran which was published in the last issue of JHI. As Professor Wojciech Hanke points out in his article, there is little awareness in the Polish public opinion of the actual scientific facts on air pollution in Poland, and rigorous training is needed that would allow scientists, politicians, and the public to understand how important is the problem of the health impact of pollution, for example on cardiovascular diseases (which are the biggest group of diseases caused by air pollution, a fact which few members of the public have been taught to appreciate). The editors of JHI would like to extend their welcome to Professor Wojciech Hanke, who will be moderating the debate on air pollution in our *Journal* in the next years.

There is also a piece of good news, in the form of the continuing decline in smoking prevalence, as evidenced in the article on cigarette smoking in Poland in 2019 by Kinga Janik-Konieczna. The article confirms the ongoing downward trend in tobacco consumption in Poland among both men and women and shows that education is the most important factor shaping the smoking prevalence in the country. It confirms that the building of health literacy is one of the most important interventions to improve the health of the Polish population. This is accompanied by an article on the history of smoking cessation treatment, which has been another important element for driving down the smoking prevalence in Poland.

On the other hand, it can be concerning that the popularity of Nicotine Delivery Devices (so-called e-cigarettes) in Poland have seen a significant growth in popularity among Polish youth. The article on e-cigarette use among Polish students shows that the prevalence of NDD use in this group is among the highest in Europe. It suggests that the Polish state needs to strengthen its efforts in preventing a wave of nicotine addiction among the youngest segment of its population.

As always, we are very pleased to present a range of articles by international scholars in the present issue of JHI. Amongst these are organisations which are the key players in shaping the future of public health in Europe, such as the European Cancer Patient Coalition (Brussels, Belgium) and the Central European Cooperative Oncology Group (CECOG).

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