Materials that accompany lectures in Social medicine
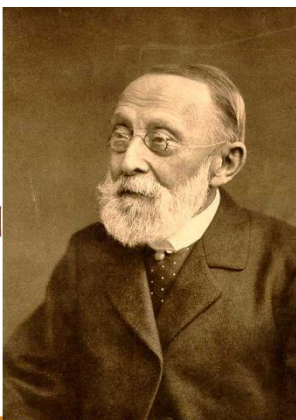
Lecture 01 – Introduction to social medicine

Social medicine is a branch of medicine that focuses on the societies and entire populations. In contract to clinical medicine that focuses on a single patient at any given time, social medicine focuses on the societies, the ways that a disease occurs in them, spreads, societal and economic impact and how the disease affects more than a single person. Of course, we do not ignore one person and clinical medicine, but we try to think about and act for the benefit of an entire population. In the essence, social medicine attempts to deliver a lot for a little. In contrast to clinical medicine, which delivers a lot for one person, the main principle of social medicine is that it is better

A LOT FOR A LITTLE, OR A LITTLE FOR A LOT?

Is it better to do **a lot for a little** [*liver transplant to a chornic alcoholic, ~400.000 Kn*] or **a little for a lot** [*Hepatitis B vaccination at 14 Kn for 28.517 children*]?

to provide a little for a lot, and by doing so have greater outreach and eventually provide more overall benefit, on a population level. On a grand scale of things, most of greatest advances in medicine are indeed attributable to such effects, like vaccinations, proper sanitation and hygiene, and eventually use of antibiotics, which are mainly measures against communicable, infectious diseases. Nowadays, medicine mostly focuses on non-communicable diseases, and this is also where social medicine has a role, by providing and developing preventive actions, interventions and ensuring that population health improves. The list of actions, that may not often be from purely medical domain include ban of smoking commercials, introduction of the "sugar tax" and similar activities, which all aim to improve health.

MEDICINE IS A SOCIAL SCIENCE AND POLITICS IS NOTHING ELSE BUT MEDICINE ON A LARGE SCALE

R. Virchow *Die Medicinische Reform, 1848*

There are six main domains of work of social medicine, including health protection (ensuring that healthy stay healthy), health improvement (ensuring that healthy get more healthy), health care (ensuring proper functioning of the health care system), data collection (providing evidence for decision making), academic public health (information dissemination) and manpower development (well, you, the students). Ever since the term social medicine was developed, there were a few of major breakthroughs, activities or lines of work that led to substantial improvement of the entire field. Among them, one that stands out is the work and career of R. Virchow, who advocated substantial improvements of health care. His famous text *Die Medicinische Reform* from 1848 is a standout, where he advocates that medicine is a social science. Several more follow, including Frank's idea of Medical police, and two major advances for the entire field originate from Croatia. The first is the development of quarantine in the Dubrovnik Republic, and the second one is works of Andrija Stampar, who developed 10 commandments for the organization and work of health care. Nowadays, the World Health Organization oversees and improves health globally, aiming to achieve the best level of health for all people. Another important goal is the Millennium Development Goals that have recently been converted to Sustainable Development Goals, aiming to provide better opportunities for health living for all.