

Scientific Underpinning

of

Preventive Medicine Associates Inc.

Social Medicine

What is a Social Medicine?

The field of **social medicine** seeks to:

1. Understand how social and economic conditions impact health, disease and the practice of medicine and
2. Foster conditions in which this understanding can lead to a healthier society.

This type of study began formally in the early 19th century. The Industrial Revolution and the subsequent increase in poverty and disease among workers raised concerns about the effect of social processes on the health of the poor.

Prominent figures in the history of social medicine include Rudolf Virchow, Salvador Allende, and more recently Paul Farmer and Jim Yong Kim.

More specifically, Farmer et al. (2006) state that “Biosocial understandings of medical phenomena [such as the social determinants of health] are urgently needed”. Paul Farmer’s view is that modern medicine is focused at the molecular level, and there is a “gap” between social analysis and everyday clinical practices. Moreover, Farmer, Nizeye, Stulac and Keshavjee (2006) view social medicine with increasing importance as scientific inquiry is increasingly “desocialized”. The latter refers to “...a tendency to ask only biological question about what are in fact biosocial phenomena.”

The field of social medicine is most commonly addressed today by public health efforts to understand what are known as Social determinants of health.

Wikipedia. (2010). Social Medicine. Retrieved on December 29, 2010.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_medicine