

Global Health Law

By Lawrence Gostin. Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-674-72884-4

This book provides an excellent systematic account of global health law by: defining the field of global health law within the broader currents of global governance for health; systematically describing and analysing the major sources of law together with their institutional frameworks; and developing critical themes to guide global health in this century. Gostin sets the backdrop to this by starting off with personal stories from the daily lives of young people living in poverty. The book is then divided into four parts.

Part 1 deals with 'failures in Global Health and Their Consequences'. It lays the foundation for the themes that permeate the book, i.e. health equity; global solidarity; health in all policies (HiAP); multiple regimens; good governance; health-promoting priorities; and the right to health. However, the main and recurring refrain throughout the book is that of global health with justice, in which all people live and work in conditions that allow them to lead healthy, productive lives. Part 1 is made up of three chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the most pressing and fundamental issues in global health, i.e. that of services universally guaranteed under the right to health; obligations of the state to safeguard the health of their populations; obligations of international players to contribute to improved health in lower-income countries; and the governance that would ensure that all states live up to their mutual responsibilities. The forces of globalisation and their impact on health are explored in chapter 2, and the boundaries between law and governance together with the categories of the major sources of global health law are described in chapter 3.

Part 2, through descriptive and normative discussion, focuses on the institutional structures that underpin global governance for

health. Part 3 considers the role of international law in global health. It systematically explores the interconnections between health and human rights. It also shows how the right to health could be more robust, paving the way for meaningful improvements in health and in health justice. It concludes with an examination of the relationship between trade and health and underscores the adverse health effects of trade liberalisation and the impact of neoliberalism and intellectual property protection on the weakening of health systems in the poorer south. The emphasis in part 4 is on global social justice and how to achieve it. Global health equity is explored through a series of case studies on prominent health threats of global significance that demand substantial public attention and action; and social, economic and political factors that have driven major reform. The book ends by asking some questions that are fundamental to achieving global health with justice. It asks what a state of genuine global health would look like, especially where this is embedded in a just world; and what it would take to achieve global health equity. It concludes by offering, as a recommendation, the Framework Convention on Global Health in which good governance, sustainable funding, research and development, and affordable access are all shown to be necessary components of global social justice in health.

The book, while highly scholarly and comprehensive, is written in easy-to-read and understandable language. It will be an invaluable resource to academics, practitioners, advocates in global health, policymakers and civil society organisations and is a must for health sciences and humanities faculties globally, and in particular in South Africa, as it resonates closely with our history and current struggle for access and equity in healthcare in an increasingly unequal society.

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