



Prof. Eliot Sorel: Now, in the 21st century, we are witnessing a health systems paradigm shift

Prof. Sorel is the Founder of the Conflict Management & Conflict Resolution Section of the World Psychiatric Association. He is a Life Member of the American Medical Association, a Fellow of the American College of Psychiatrists, and a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. He is an internationally recognized global health leader, educator, health systems policy expert and practicing physician.

He has professorial appointments in Global Health, Health Services Management and Leadership in the School of Public Health as well as in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Medicine at George Washington University.

He is the Senior Adviser to the Ion Ratiu Democracy Award (IRDA) at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C.

In June 2014 he was awarded the *Doctor Honoris Causa* by the Politehnica University of Bucharest and in October 2009, he was awarded the *Doctor Honoris Causa* by Carol Davila Medical University Bucharest, Romania. The President of Romania awarded Prof. Sorel the Star of Romania Order of Commander in 2004.

In 1999, Prof. Eliot Sorel initiated and led „Opening the Gates to Romania” project at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington. His venture was catalytic in promoting Romania’s culture in the United States of America: the Romanian monasteries, food, crafts, music and dance were all presented at their best. A wooden Maramures church was also build piece by piece on the National Mall in the center of Washington as part of that year’s Festival.

Being in Bucharest this week, in the end of January 2015, to shape up the scientific program of the WPA 2015 Bucharest International Congress, Prof. Eliot Sorel has generously offered us an interview about global health.

Prof. Eliot Sorel:

“Now, in the 21st century we witness a paradigm shift in health systems, educational systems, professional education and training as well as in health policy making at local, regional and global levels. *Health and education are essential for national & global growth development.* When policy makers think about health and educational systems they must be educated that these are *investments, not costs.* This way of thinking about health & education is a challenge for most of the world, Romania included.

All current health systems are unsustainable by virtue of their fragmentation and lack of integration. The WPA 2013 Bucharest Congress addressed these challenges then and we plan to do so again in an enhanced fashion at the WPA 2015 Bucharest IC with the theme, *Primary Care Mental Health: Innovation & Transdisciplinarity*, key components of the of the 21st century paradigm shift. These solutions are systemic, systematic and integrative across systems: in health, in education and policy making.”

Q: What is a paradigm shift?

Prof. Eliot Sorel: “The 21st century paradigm shift in health systems implies a move from the 19th and 20th century hospital & specialty based models to collaborative/integrated teams model across disciplines working together, well connected through information & communication technology as well as, ideally in the same location. Primary care, mental health and public health integration presents one such opportunity in realizing such new integrated systems that will likely enhance access, quality and affordability as well as reduce stigma and discrimination. Our WPA 2015 Bucharest IC will address thoroughly this model through Plenary sessions, Symposia, Workshops and Leadership Fora as well as a specially designed course for Young Health Professionals on, *Integrating Primary & Secondary Prevention in Primary Care.*”

Q: Access to medical service is unequal, not just in Romania but also in the rest of the world. Can the issue be solved?

Prof. Eliot Sorel: “It most certainly can be solved. The collaborative, integrated model we propose coupled with health policy decisions predicated on health & education as investments, the allocation of the right balance of human & financial resources coupled with rigorous management will go a long way towards meeting these aspirations.”

Q: What are the most common illnesses now, in the 21st century, in contrast to the 19th and 20th century? How should the medical care system address all these issues given the world’s ever aging population?

Prof. Eliot Sorel: “Great progress has been made in medical research, clinical services and health policies in the 19th & 20th century, enhancing populations’ health, longevity and the quality of life. Significant disparities remain between different parts of the world, between the rich and poor, between genders and children’s health. Non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular, diabetes, depression, and others, lead in the global burden of diseases and of disability. In an OECD study published in July 2014, *Making Mental Health Count*, it is noted that mental illnesses represent 30%-40% of the global burden of disability in the OECD countries. Such percentages cannot be ignored. They are not just about the disease itself anymore. They also affect the economic and social welfare of countries. This is why nations should invest in health systems and the continuum between health, health care and health systems. Such a continuum would have as its starting point primary prevention, a populations’ health focus that is now scarcely practiced in the world. There should also be a solid continuity between primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. The current global health model with its lack of primary prevention, a dominant tertiary prevention coupled with secondary prevention, is expensive, inefficient and unsustainable.

In a new, 21st century collaborative, integrated model, tertiary prevention would still have a place and a role but would be superseded by primary and secondary prevention.”

Q: You are knowledgeable about the Romanian medical system. How should we start the process of change? What is the first step? Do you think that changes in Central and Eastern Europe have affected the populations' health?

Prof. Eliot Sorel: “I believe you are referring to the determinants of health. These are of multiple: biological, genetic, social, economic, political, cultural, etc. For building an efficient and viable health systems model, we must take into considerations all these determining factors. The 19th and 20th century models leave out most of the social determinants that are of vital importance.

The *WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health* addressed very well all these factors. They are critical variables that must be taken into account when designing the new, collaborative/integrated models of healthcare system. The success of primary, secondary and tertiary preventions is influenced by the all the social determinants of health as health is determined by physical, psychological and social factors, it is a state of total wellbeing not just the absence of disease.

Q: Do you think physicians and policy makers should concentrate on a local approach regarding these issues?

Prof. Eliot Sorel: It is essential to have a continuity between the global, the national and local perspectives on health as they greatly influence one another. They also need to be gender specific, mindful of the life cycle, the needs of children, elderly, women and men. Romania should be an active agent in this reinventing process of health systems. Romania can facilitate collaborative projects at national and international level that are likely to be of mutual benefit and could play a leading and catalytic role for enhancing health systems' performance and populations' health for Central & Southeast Europe.

Q: Migration of medical personnel has been recorded in recent years. Is this an issue? If yes, what is the solution?

Prof. Eliot Sorel: This is indeed a critical issue for many countries in the world subjected to *brain drain*. At the moment, there is a deficit of almost 4.5 million qualified medical personnel in the world. Considering human

rights and the right of free migration, people can go wherever they feel they can do better in a free, globalized world. However, this is also a challenge for policymakers who must create favorable work conditions and career paths that are attractive for the young, talented Romanian health professionals to stay in Romania. Romania's smart, talented young people across domains, such as health, IT, education, business and many others are Romania's greatest asset.

Q: What collaborative projects do you now have with Romania?

Prof. Eliot Sorel: We have started a Politehnica University Bucharest and the George Washington University a project that will be launched this year. The project provide incentives for young Romanian and American scholars to develop scientific concept papers with a focus on *ICT, cybersecurity, and health systems' performance*. There will be a competition between the graduates students of the two universities and the best projects will be financially aided by a common fund. These projects will be just the foundation for future research projects applications in the three domains referred to.

Q: What are main themes in the incoming June WPA 2015 Bucharest International Congress at the Palace of Parliament, 24-27 June ?

Prof. Eliot Sorel: We will be elaborating on the the 21st century paradigm shift in health systems, and the enormous challenge for professionals, for populations' health, for the training and education of the next generation of health professionals and health leaders, for educating and influencing policymakers, politicians, and the media.

We will present *innovative research from genomics to bioethics, to health systems models, the role of IT plenary sessions, populations' health symposia and workshops as well as leadership fora* and a special course for young health professionals with the aim bridging the gap between primary care, mental health and public health, enhancing populations' health, health systems performance as well as their accessibility, quality and affordability 21st century.

It is a great pleasure for me to be back in Bucharest. I was pleased to know that the capital has recently celebrated its 555th birthday. During the WPA

2015 Bucharest International Congress we cordially invite our colleagues from around the world to join us at this extraordinary scientific congress and also have a taste of Romania's & Bucharest's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and the warm hospitality of the Romanian people.

Cornelia Stanciu