

Polio Commemoration at Utah Valley University



The first thing brought up in this commemoration meeting was the importance of remembrance. I think it is easy for us in the modern age with all the medical advances to forget about the fear and pain that was brought on by these past diseases. Current technology and education makes it easier to remember. We can see signs of the disease in ancient Egyptian drawings. We can access the photos on polio rooms in hospitals, where hundreds of people lined warehouse floors in iron lung machines. Remembrance is key to remaining motivated in fully eradicating this disease. Right now, polio is 99.9% eradicated from this planet. But there needs to be additional efforts to reach the furthest areas of the globe to ensure no one ever has to deal with the horrible ramifications of polio.

The third goal in the UN's plan for sustainable development is ensuring the health and lives of everyone around the globe, regardless of their location or economic status. This involves teaching people about the early warning signs of polio, because only .5% of polio victims present the devastating effects like paralysis. In addition to understanding the warning signs, the world must work at reducing the risks of contracting polio in regions where it still exists. The difficulty

in doing this is most of the remaining cases are in the various mountain ranges in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Not only does the treacherous terrain make it hard to reach these children, but the constant armed conflict on the border region between these two countries add additional harm. But there are groups devoted to finally reaching that goal of total eradication.

Like their work towards other goals of sustainability, the Rotary is deeply involved in giving access to vaccines to children all over the world. The first polio vaccine was created by scientist Jonah Salk. This was a killed or inactive vaccine, and instead of filing a patent and financially benefitting off the vaccine, Salk made it available to everyone, saying “this vaccine belongs to the world”. Since then, the vaccine has spread to all corners of the earth and benefitted all of humankind. But still billions were unable to access the vaccine, whether it was from lack of resources, including medical help, transportation, etc. Because of this, Rotary teamed up with the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation to carry the vaccine to as many people as they can. Since they started this project, they have given the vaccine to over 2 billion children globally. This reach and impact cannot be understated. Members of the Rotary have traveled to the mountain regions of India to administer the vaccine to children there.

The UN goal for sustainability of ensuring the health and lives of each human through the polio vaccine is important. Not only does it save lives, but it is also an attainable and achievable goal. It sets a clear vision with a specific outcome that is able to be tracked. It is a good investment. Preventing people from getting sick makes all aspects of society better. It strengthens the system and it also sets the stage for the success of these rural and mountainous regions. Learning about the work being done to fully eradicate polio from the earth was engaging and uplifting. These organizations and people are putting in the work to give these hard-to-reach people the same opportunities to thrive as we in America have.

Mitchell Hansen, UVU student