

BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

Caring for Them From Birth to Death: The Practice of Community-based Cuban Medicine

Cristina Perez

Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2008, 315 pp., \$70, hardcover

Community Health Care in Cuba: An Enduring Model

Susan E. Mason, David L. Strug, Joan Beder, eds.

Chicago, Lyceum Press, 2009, 288 pp., \$44.95, paperback

Health, Politics, and Revolution in Cuba Since 1898

Katherine Hirschfeld

New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 2008, 266 pp., \$29.95, paperback.

Primary Health Care in Cuba: The Other Revolution

Linda M. Whiteford, Laurence G. Branch

Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2007, 138 pp., \$24.95, paperback.

Social Relations and the Cuban Health Miracle

Elizabeth Kath

Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 2010, 266 pp., \$49.95, hardcover.

Writing this review on multiple texts about Cuba's medical system was challenging. I read five recently published books, two by anthropologists; two by professionals in public health, clinical medicine, and social work; and one by a political scientist. Like much of the available information on Cuba in general, many of the views expressed in these books were characterized by political polarization. It was difficult to make sense of the reality of Cuban health care. Nonetheless, based on these multiple sources, I have been able to arrive at some fundamental conclusions.

First, Cuba does have a state-run medical system that, for whatever its challenges, has been quite successful, especially when compared with those of other countries in the

Caribbean and Central America. This system integrates primary, secondary, and tertiary care health care services and provides them universally to the Cuban people.

Second, much of the success of Cuba's system is based on a family medicine model, known as comprehensive general medicine or *medicina general integral* in Spanish. In this model, teams made up of a family physician and a nurse (with significant clinical contributions from social workers) are responsible for the primary health care needs of relatively small groups of people, all located within defined geographic catchment areas.

Third, Cuba's system is embedded in a unique social, economic, and political environment. This system is a result of, among other factors, a revolutionary ideology that gave birth to centralized government planning and a geographically decentralized system of undergraduate and graduate medical education, as well as political and economic alignments (and antagonisms) forged during the cold war.

Fourth, no medical system is as good as its proponents suggest or as bad as its critics claim. (Not Cuba's, not ours, not anybody's. Only politicians insist otherwise.)

The Cuban approach to health care stands out as an alternative to systems modeled after those that exist in the United States and other Western social democracies. Due to Cuba's exportation of medical personnel, it has become a prototype for many developing countries around the world. Given the huge global burden of acute and chronic diseases, it is worthwhile to examine the Cuban system in light of the historical and cultural forces that have influenced its development and its relative accomplishments.

For family medicine educators working in the United States, it is obviously valuable to look to other countries, including Cuba, that have developed solutions to provide universal health care. We may not find the answers to our health system problems in these explorations, but certainly we broaden our perspective to help us move creatively toward a more sustainable and just system. For family medicine educators working internationally,

Book	Type, Focus, and Orientation
<i>Community Health Care in Cuba</i>	Multi-authored review of PHC system. One chapter on medical education. Most others review social worker participation in PHC. Supportive analysis of Cuban PHC.
<i>Caring for Them From Birth to Death</i>	Ethnography conducted intermittently from 2001 to 2007. Focus on FM model and community participation of MD/RN teams. Highly praiseworthy of Cuban system and health outcomes.
<i>Health, Politics, and Revolution in Cuba Since 1898</i>	Part ethnography (conducted in 1997), part historical analysis. Highly critical of common academic assessments of Cuban health system; questions the veracity of Cuban health statistics.
<i>Primary Health Care in Cuba*</i>	Historical and policy review of Cuban PHC. Special emphasis on integration of MCH, infectious disease, and chronic illness care in PHC model, linking FM and PH. Relatively ideologically balanced.
<i>Social Relations and the Cuban Health Miracle</i>	Ethnography conducted in 2003/2004. Focus on social and economic forces within Cuba relating to MCH. Relatively balanced: supportive of successes; critical of long-term outlooks.

* Recommended for FM educators

FM—family medicine
MCH—maternal and child health
PHC—primary health care
PH—public health

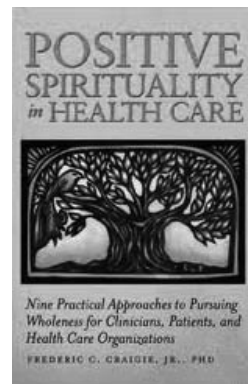
knowledge of the Cuban health system could be quite valuable. True medical internationalism implies learning as well as teaching, and there are Cuban medical advisors around the globe with whom we can share knowledge and insights.

While each of the books has its own strengths, weaknesses, and intended audiences, it is Whitehead and Branch's *Primary Health Care in Cuba: The Other Revolution* that I recommend as the best of the group for readers of *Family Medicine*. A short, relatively balanced, and immensely readable summary, it will provide a concise overview of the Cuban health care system for family medicine educators, and other interested audiences, wherever they may be.

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Positive Spirituality in Health Care: Nine Practical Approaches to Pursuing Wholeness for Clinicians, Patients, and Health Care Organizations

Frederic C. Craigie, Jr.
Minneapolis, Mill City Press, 2010, \$21.95, paperback



Frederic Craigie's *Positive Spirituality in Health Care* is a practical guide, chock full of resources to assist health care providers connect to what's really important for themselves, their patients, and their organizations. The book is based on Dr Craigie's more than 30 years' experience as a behavioral science teacher of family physicians and as a clinician in a small community in Maine. The book reads like a quickly paced and delightful conversation with the author. It is a soothing reminder that deep connection to our patients and ourselves can give us greater meaning.

The books' intended audience is medical providers who aim to integrate spiritual awareness into their work directly with patients but