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The Korean Peninsula: Our Cause For A Serious Case Over 70 Years

Sin Gon Kim

Korea University Anam Hospital, Korea, Republic of

We have, before us, a patient of 70 years. The pessimistic patient has not the ability to overcome this longstanding-illness; however, we were recently able to observe minimal changes indicating reviviscence. Is it not our duty, as a doctor, to make an attempt in understanding the suffering this patient has gone through? To do our utmost in rehabilitating and providing aid for recovery? Would not a scholar with vocation show great interest and perhaps find a pinnacle of their research in the pathogenesis and course of what 70 years of illnesses have brought upon this patient?

Many of you, by now, have probably guessed correctly: our patient suffering 70 years of serious illnesses is none other than the Korean Peninsula itself. 70 years of division has created much more than a physical gap: it's created a gap in health and medicine, system, culture of wellness, concept of disease, education for medical personnel, etc.

There is much to do in terms of, but not limited to: cooperative exchange, restoring the gap in health, overcoming heterogeneity in medical culture, and integrating medical terms. We'd like to suggest three reasons for paying attention to the Korean Peninsula regardless of our country, religion or political ground; empathy, risk and benefit.

Empathy: Foremost, the imbalance of health and medicine puts a heavy burden on our hearts. The average lifespan between North and South Korea differs 11 years, the under-five mortality rate is 7 times more likely in the North. According to the Global Hunger Index 2018, North Korea is rated at 11th, and four out of five children under the age of five have stunted growth. These are all challenges our loved ones would have faced if they had been born 60km north of Seoul. Had the Korean Peninsula been an actual living and breathing patient we couldn't shift responsibilities onto others. After all, understanding and empathizing with the suffering of our neighbors is an invaluable virtue for a good doctor.

Risk: The Korean Peninsula is no larger than 220,000 km². Bacteria, viruses, air pollution doesn't distinguish North and South. This small mass of land share the same environment, with similar climate, and the probability of transmitting infectious disease including multidrug resistant tuberculosis. The range of issues, from social to health and medicine is a subject for discussion that should view Korea as a whole. The nuclearization of the North is not just a political issue, but may very well be linked to the liveliness and health of the Korean Peninsula and the rest of the world.

Benefit: From a global standpoint, the Korean Peninsula is a unique cohort. The North and South are genetically the same, but through 70 years of division each side has been exposed to separate environments. It is the only cohort on earth where we can examine the progress of disease over generations in two significantly different environments, on the premise of a genetically identical population. As the isolated Galapagos Island has provided afflatus for modern science, how much could we learn if we could do a joint comparative research of the divided North and South Korean citizens? Imagine the monumental accomplishments the Korean Peninsula could present if both Korean and international scholars could study and compare the affects of environment on various diseases, including epigenetic change.

Psychological, and social health are also very important research topics as well - innumerable casualties as a result of civil war, 70 years of mutual enmity and confrontation. If the Korean Peninsula could overcome its conflict; and together, strive towards reconciliation and cooperation, the action would provide insights to the dynamics of psychological, social, and scientific issues. A historical exemplification of how Korea transformed its tragic division into an inspiration and catalyst of hope.

For either side that has given hurt and known only hostility towards the other, health and medicine

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could provide a unique form of communication towards reconciliation and comfort. Hopefully it's a tool with the purpose of bringing healing and providing a platform for impartial communication with the North.

During this lecture, let us share our thoughts and vocation as a medical personnel on the matter of Korea as a health community.