

Rutgers Around the World - Episode 9: Clinical Care & the Global Impact of AIDS Transcript

HOST: This program is a production of Rutgers Global.

HOST/VO: Rutgers' vision, globalized world, international learning, unique opportunities, global health, study abroad, expand our horizons.

HOST: This is...*Rutgers Around the World*. A finger on the pulse of all things global at Rutgers.

HOST: Hi, I'm Jayne Chacko, Rutgers senior and host of the podcast, *Rutgers Around the World*. Welcome!

On today's episode, our guest has done extensive research on HIV and AIDS and its global impact, as well as set up the first HIV/AIDS clinic in Boston. He's created partnerships with Botswana, developed national AIDS training programs, and worked extensively with the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

He's also served as Executive Director for the Harvard AIDS Initiative. On our phone line, please welcome Dr. Richard Marlink, Director of the Rutgers Global Health Institute. Thank you so much for speaking with us today.

DR. MARLINK: Thank you for having me Jayne.

HOST: So Dr. Marlink, you have quite a background. Originally you were an oncologist by training. How did you come to work in the field of HIV/AIDS?

DR. MARLINK: Well I guess it was before we even knew it was an epidemic. I was in my 4th year of medical school and then an intern also at St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village in New York, and many of our patients and even colleagues and friends were coming down sick with what was later known to be AIDS. I guess from that personal experience at the very beginning of the epidemic, I've just been involved in it since. I went to train at Harvard and Boston as an oncologist and we started the first AIDS clinic in Boston with the Infectious Disease Group at our hospital, which was the only hospital that would see AIDS patients at that time in Boston. So really since the beginning of the epidemic or even before the epidemic in 1980, I've been involved with AIDS.

HOST: And so you've been busy since your arrival at Rutgers in 2016, and the President of Botswana visited Rutgers University this year as a Global Health Partner, and you've worked with Botswana on several occasions. Can you tell us about these partnerships, past and present, and why they were necessary?

DR. MARLINK: I guess that, probably most global health work, is based on partnerships. Many times you're operating in someone else's backyard, someone else's home, so to speak, in another country or even if you're in New Jersey, you're in another community or a clinic setting, so it's really the partnerships that you create and you work together. I've been working in Botswana since 1996. I helped create the Botswana Harvard AIDS Institute Partnership. I was the Executive Director at the Harvard AIDS Initiative, and along with Max Essex, who was the chair at the time. We started a partnership with the government of Botswana and I also brought in, in the year 2000, two other partners: The Gates Foundation and the Merck Company that formed a partnership with the government of Botswana also to really begin the intensive and expensive proposition of trying to scale up AIDS treatment to the entire country of Botswana, which at the time, was the most affected country in the world in terms of prevalence of the HIV virus.

The new president of Botswana has visited Rutgers. The invitation of President Barchi and myself and Francis Barchi and Rick Garfunkel, the head of Rutgers Global. The new president, when he was in town or nearby in New York for the UN General Assembly, was able to come visit Rutgers and go to a Rutgers Football game and have discussions with how we can strengthen and expand the partnership with Rutgers and the country of Botswana.

HOST: And what are the health needs this partnership between Rutgers and Botswana hopes to address? And what impact have these partnerships had?

DR. MARLINK: Well Botswana continues to have a severe AIDS problem. They've, really as a country, have scaled up treatment so that it's available in every public clinic, and there's universal healthcare, so it's really available to every citizen of Botswana and it's still a problem because the prevalence is so high. Potentially one in four people walking down the street have HIV, but again, they've worked hard as a country to address the problem, but the others that are relatively unaddressed are cancer and other noninfectious diseases that countries worldwide are affected by that many developing countries are now having increased incidents of noninfectious diseases, really the western diseases, so to speak, are diseases of lifestyle or diseases that you get when you do live longer, and cancer is one of the biggest. So we're also partnering with the medical school in Botswana and the Ministry of Health and Wellness to try to improve or scale up cancer treatment and cancer prevention, which is a big issue there and in many developing countries.

HOST: Since you currently serve as Director of the Global Health Institute now, how did your work in HIV and AIDS lead to your work in global health?

DR. MARLINK: Again, AIDS is a worldwide epidemic, but disproportionately, the epidemic affects Africa and especially southern Africa. The general population of most countries there that really had to learn how to get involved in global health and global partnerships to help address AIDS and so whether it is AIDS or other health issues, those that don't have access to health care and those that are disproportionately affected by either through social situations or through poverty, make them more vulnerable to poor health, more vulnerable to getting infections like AIDS or HIV. You become involved, in which is the definition of global health, is really helping those vulnerable populations worldwide trying to address health inequity that don't have access to health and healthcare.

HOST: With your extensive background in HIV/AIDS awareness, education, and treatment programs, how has this affected your role here at Rutgers? What current plans does the Global Health Institute have to address that particular area of study?

DR. MARLINK: Global health is really about building and achieving better health for populations in need through partnerships. It's also about getting things done that require multiple disciplines to solve or improve health systems or the social determinants of health, so that is exciting in terms of Rutgers because Rutgers brings twenty-nine different schools and multiple centers, many hundreds actually, centers and institutes, to bear as a huge research university that can bring those disciplines together, can bring teams and partnering together to address global health problems. Again, whether those problems are in Botswana or whether they're in New Jersey, we still have inequities and vulnerable populations in both settings and they can be addressed by a global health approach, which is partnerships and multidisciplinary teams to solve problems.

HOST: For those that are unaware, there are quite a number of Global Health Seed Grants, specifically in Research and in education, training, and capacity building. What, if there are any, seed grants are being using to combat the threat of HIV and AIDS globally with Rutgers?

DR. MARLINK: Well we have multiple seed grants. We've given five each year so far, again, we've only been around for less than two years, and they range from HIV education grants in other countries, trying to scale up surgical training or indicators. Many times in developing countries, it's not the surgery, it's getting to the surgeon, having emergency between the accidents and getting to a surgical team shortened and done through skilled emergency technicians, which don't exist. So we have different seed grants that also involve AIDS, but also involve global surgery and other efforts around the world. Going forward, the grants will involve grants to those that have created partnerships, especially ones that involve multiple disciplines to, again, try to strengthen the partnerships in global health at home or in other countries.

HOST: And it's also true that the Rutgers Global Health Institute focuses on "New Jersey's Vulnerable Populations." How would you say New Jersey's focus is related to a global perspective?

DR. MARLINK: Well, the settings, again, vulnerable populations may not be part of the health system. Those types of communities are people are going to exist anywhere and in New Jersey, they especially exist in our urban settings, they exist in communities that are of new immigrants who may not speak english or may be worried about family members or others in the community and their immigration status, so they are really not as likely to engage in the health system. So I think those sort of vulnerable settings and vulnerable populations exist everywhere, and in New Jersey, Rutgers is known to be a leader and really a champion in addressing that.

HOST: And what else is on the horizon for the Global Health Institute and what's next for you?

DR. MARLINK: Well next for me is usually getting on a airplane unfortunately. The Global Health Institute has just released its five year strategic plan, which will be available on our websites. We've sort of spent a lot of the initial year and a half doing strategic planning and getting to know all the strengths, and now, we're really ready to implement our partnerships and implement our plan. We have seven focus areas that we're trying to have multidisciplinary teams of faculty and students. We can't do everything, so we take one community and we try to make an impact in these seven different areas.

HOST: Well we're looking forward to whatever the future holds for you and thank you so much for your insight and time, Dr. Marlink!

DR. MARLINK: Thank you.

HOST: That was Dr. Richard Marlink, the Director for The Global Health Institute at Rutgers.

That's all the time we have for this episode of *Rutgers Around the World*. Join us next time as we discuss all things global with members of the Rutgers community. Thanks for tuning in!