

Abstract

The right to health, bodywork, and HTLV-1

by: Fiona Fowler

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The year 2020 has been unforgettable, a year that for many has brought experiences of isolation, uncertainty, and a sense of lost control in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. With few historical reference points for the global crisis we continue to face, as social workers we must turn to new ways of knowing, being and doing, while standing firm in the premise of our profession—that when tragedy and disaster besets a community, the repercussions are experienced more severely by the poor, the vulnerable and the colonized. Our role to prevent the inequalities that predispose such outcomes, and to address the injustices that arise from them, is what defines our collective task. In this paper, I do not report on a Human Rights Project carried out amidst the complexities of, or in response to, the global pandemic. Although I look forward to reading and hearing about how Covid-19 shaped our practice for the better in years to come. I note Covid-19 precisely because I conducted this initiative—a classroom- based empathy project with students of social work (Gair, 2011)—on the cusp of a pandemic lockdown, and the introduction of regulations that would have us peer at the very bounds of our empathy as we limit our lifestyles to honor the health needs of individuals and communities known and unknown to us. Has our kinship with an empathic practice orientation evolved, increased, or narrowed as a result of our personal and corporate experiences of 2020? Do the responses of students in the project undertaken here still resonate for them? Do they continue to deem their experiences of this project relevant for their future social work practice? The answers to these questions lie in future research, impressions gathered in the classroom and the stories that clients of social work will tell of their service experiences. But they are questions I must begin by asking. For as I come to reflect on a project that I facilitated almost a year ago, in assessing its relevance and applicability to social work education I must do so with consideration for the personal, community and global change that has occurred in between.