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Monday, 24 November 2014

I can't seem to take this coat off!



Last month, the Mason Institute had the privilege of co-hosting a guest lecture by eminent Public Health Law Professor Larry Gostin, entitled '[Imagining Global Health with Justice](#)'. Professor Gostin discussed his latest book [Global Health Law](#) and considered the arguments made therein against the backdrop of the recent Ebola outbreak. This was the first opportunity that I had to listen to him speak and I am so glad that I went along, but I left encased in a motley coat of emotions that I just can't seem to take off.

First, **inspiration**: the passion with which Professor Gostin spoke, the considerable progress that has already been made in improving global health and striving towards the [UN Post-2015 Development Agenda](#). It was heartening to hear that so many individuals and institutions are dedicating themselves towards the achievement of global health with justice. Professor Gostin shared with us some very important ways in which we might do so. Then along came **shame** closely followed by **guilt**: as we were reminded of the inequalities within the world, the narrative of hardship and suffering, 'the narrative of the poor' that remains. The fact that we are focussing on 'the wrong priority' and the injustices of global disparities in health. The fact that the international community has failed the countries most affected by Ebola.

Then there was **frustration**: one question perpetually bugs me and Professor Gostin's talk had the effect of magnifying it under a strobe light. It seemed like every word that Professor Gostin spoke, every comment that arose from the panel and the audience led back to that one resounding question: **BUT WHAT CAN I DO?**

Most of my research lies in data sharing, how is that going to help? I don't work for the World Health Organisation, I'm not a medic or an aid worker who can volunteer, I'm not a millionaire philanthropist, and I'm not even influential academic who might actually influence leaders. But maybe, in order to help, we don't need to be any of these things. Perhaps the common thread that binds all these aspects of the motley coat of emotions together is caring enough to do something, anything. Maybe it's about taking some ownership of the challenges standing in the way of achieving global health with justice, and helping however we can, whatever that 'help' might look like.

This is a concern central to the Mason Institute – trying to figure out how we can help. One of the issues that cropped up in a lunch time round-table with Professor Gostin earlier in the day centred on the importance of data sharing. With accurate, complete data on health, education, social care, for example, we can develop a better understanding of local, national and global health needs. We can identify problems and work towards solutions. Exploring how we can legally and ethically facilitate research through data sharing, that's one way that we can help, and it's central to the work of the [FARR Institute](#) and [ADRN](#).

So I guess I'm starting to find out what to do with my motley coat – what about you?

Posted by [Mason Institute](#) at 07:37

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