Achievements, challenges and threats to the Brazilian universal health system

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Achievements in the 90’s

• Constitution (1988) defines health as human right
  • It creates the Unified Health System (SUS)

• In practice, the SUS:
  • Increases vaccination coverage and prenatal and childbirth care,
  • Universalizes oral rehydration
  • Implements the Community Health Agents and the Family Health Programs
  • Implements Emergence Care Program and pharmaceutical assistance
  • Strengthens the health surveillance system

• As results, the SUS:
  • Reduces the incidence of diseases susceptible to prevent by vaccines
  • Reduces infant mortality
  • Increases population life expectancy.
Achievements in the 90’s

• Inflation control
• Decentralization
  • Municipalities
• Social participation
  • Health councils
Challenges

• Some communicable diseases continue with high prevalence
• Non-communicable diseases increase their prevalence
• New problems, as dengue and Zika, emerge
• Violence grows significantly
• Inequities persist
Achievements in the 2000’s

- Economic growth and income distribution
- Public health services expansion
  - Mental health care
  - Oral health care
Economic crisis

- In 2011, global economic crisis strongly affects the country
  - The GDP, which grew 4.5% a year, on average, between 2004 and 2011, falls to a retraction of 3.8% in 2015
  - Unemployment rises from 6.5% in December 2014 to 12% in December 2016.
- Measures taken by Roussef government are ineffective
- Mass demonstrations erupt, popular support for Roussef government falls quickly
Political crisis

- The combination of economic and political crisis strengthens the opposition
  - The National Congress approves Roussef’s impeachment

- The vice-president Temer takes office as the new president and adopts a new political program based on what is called “fiscal austerity”
  - Temer makes explicit his central goal: to ensure the primary surplus in public accounts so as not to compromise the public debt service that represents 45% of the federal budget.
“Austerity” measures

- A constitutional amendment establishes the inflation index of the previous year as the annual ceiling for the growth of government spending for the next 20 years.

- Estimates of the impact of this amendment indicate that:
  - Federal health spending, in 2036, will represent 1.2% of GDP against the current 1.7%
  - In per capita terms, spending will be fixed at US$ 156 for 20 years.
There are good evidence that the so-called austerity policies generate job loss, increased unemployment and impoverishment.

These conditions compromise mental health, with increased incidence of stress and alcohol abuse,

The number of suicide cases increases,

The prevalence of chronic as well as infectious diseases, particularly in vulnerable populations, gets higher.
Threats to health

- Given that a large part of the Brazilian population lives in a situation of social vulnerability
  - there are, at least, 14 million families whose income does not exceed US$ 57 per capita per month –
- a real health tragedy may occur, if the government can implement the newly approved austerity measures.
Threats to democracy

- In 2014, the then candidate of opposition to the presidency of the Republic proposed this fiscal austerity policy and was defeated.

- Temer, thus, begins his government under a double illegitimacy:
  - based on a process of impeachment, without a proof of crime of responsibility by President Roussef, and
  - adopting an economic policy rejected by the voters.
Democracy and social rights

- An attack on the democratic regime accompanies the disrespect for social rights.
  - Labor reform
  - Social Security reform
- The approval of the constitutional amendment that freezes social spending deepens this attack,
  - since it violates the Constitution's non-modifiable clauses, such as the right to health and education.
The question that arises is, then:

- How do the current coalition in power think of sustaining itself politically, considering its double illegitimacy?
- Will they try to stop the general elections of 2018?
- Wounded their social rights, the Brazilians will lose their political rights and democratic freedoms?
• THANK YOU!

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