



RESEARCH2REALITY

Shining a light on research & innovation.

'Go With the Science' for Healthier Countries

An interview with 2018 John Dirks Canada Gairdner Global Health Award Laureates:

Alan Lopez, Health Economist, University of Melbourne

Christopher Murray, Physician & Health Economist, University of Washington

Alan Lopez

Governments everywhere ought to be monitoring the health of their population. Is it getting better? Is it getting worse? What is it that's driving that? And we provide that platform through the burden of disease.

Christopher Murray

The Global Burden of Disease is our rubric for saying we want to measure all the important aspects of health in every community in the world over time, and in a way that allows comparison, so that you can compare Canada to the U.S., or you can compare Arizona to a province in China.

Alan Lopez

You've got to tell a story about how disease and injuries and risk factors have evolved. So we go for this dimension of being very, very comprehensive, because we think that's what policy makers want.

What have you learned through the GBD?

Christopher Murray

When we look at all the data and step back from it, there's some really big trends happening. First of all, the world, in almost all countries, except some

TODAY'S RESEARCH. TOMORROW'S REALITY.



places with conflict like Yemen and Syria, have been making progress. Life spans are getting longer. There's a general trend from health being dominated by early death to ill health being dominated by disability. And the big causes of disability aren't the same things that kill you. And so the big causes of disability are mental disorders, substance abuse, and musculoskeletal disorders, like back pain, neck pain, arthritis.

What future idea most excites you?

Christopher Murray

The idea that I'm most excited about right now is a comprehensive future health scenario platform, so that you can actually say, how would the future of Canada, or whatever country you're thinking about, be different if I did a better job of reducing smoking, or if we tackled cholesterol, a wide array of the risks in drivers there? So that's really exciting because I think it creates the connection from the diagnosis to the prescription.

What has the GBD achieved globally so far?

Christopher Murray

On a country-by-country basis, there's lots of examples of specific diseases that have, we've shone a light on a problem that hasn't been getting attention. Two or three weeks ago, our collaborative team in India published six analyses around the burden of disease by state, and it was the front page of every major Indian newspaper, you had the government saying that this is really important and we're going to act on this. So that model of uptake and co-ownership, I think is the right model, and we're going to keep investing and building that collaboration.



Alan Lopez

Yes, it'll be tough, and there will be an environment around you that dissuades you from doing it, or there's an easier road. Ignore that. If you really believe that it's important, go after it. You will upset people's conventional ideas and wisdom. Too bad. Do what you think the science tells you to do and go with the science.