

Let History Be the Judge: Or Sex Drugs and Jelly Rolls

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Presentation to the Annual Conference of Diabetes New Zealand

May 8th, 2009

Let me begin by saying that I know little about Diabetes but a lack of knowledge has never stopped me telling people what I think they should do. When I joined the staff of the Royal New Zealand Foundation For the Blind (as it then was) I knew nothing about disabilities or visual impairment. In fact I thought retinitis pigmentosa was an Italian Cheese. So I am going to give you a few suggestions that you might like to think about drawn largely from history, our history as active members of civil society.

I understand that there are approximately 15,000 people with type 1 diabetes and about 270,000 people with type 2 diabetes of whom about 1/3 are undiagnosed. I also know that we have been experiencing unprecedented increases in the rate of diabetes worldwide.

In recent weeks we have seen the world's governments coordinating a massive effort to prevent the spread of swine flu which has claimed the lives of maybe 100 – 200 people. Massive resources have been thrown at this problem. So why are the governments of the world are not equally focused on the real and apparent threat represented by the diabetes epidemic?

Part of the answer lies, I would suggest, in the effectiveness of your organisation and similar organisations both in this country and globally. This is what I wish to focus on this evening. The effectiveness or otherwise of organisations like Diabetes New Zealand in making this a better world.

On your web site I saw that you invited a group of experts to predict what the situation with respect to diabetes would be in 2025. The picture is quite confusing.

Professor Russell Scott said *“Diabetes is exploding in the world and will more heavily impact on certain sectors of the New Zealand community. The treatments that are available today are not really different from 40 years ago and will remain little changed in the next 20 years.*

The rise in obesity and diabetes has been more rapid than anyone predicted. The toxic environment for obesity and diabetes is well entrenched and will not be easily modifiable. While wide scale community prevention seems a dream, a cure seems further off than ever.”

Suzanne Snively said *“Recent trends have shown an escalation in the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes. Projecting these trends forward, this single disease will require an estimated 15% of the health budget to be devoted to the treatment of the awful*

complications of Type 2 diabetes, including loss to eyesight, limb amputations, heart disease, strokes and so on."

Dr. Rod Jackson on the other hand said: *"In 2025 there will be no type 2 diabetes in New Zealand. Nor will there be any obesity, hypertension or hypercholesterolaemia"*

He was supported in this view by Dr. Robyn Toomath who predicted that *"The most exciting changes however will be in the environment. The government will have realised that in order for the population to remain healthy we need to be eating well.*

Advertisements for unhealthy food and drinks will have gone the way of those for tobacco. Supermarket checkouts won't be lined with sweets, and gigantic bottles of soft drink and chippies will be a thing of the past.

Fruit and vegetables will be cheaper than pies and take away food and nutritious food will be all that is available in all schools and work-places.

Cycling to work won't be the hazardous experience it is now as a result of new cycle ways and road rules that give cyclists and pedestrian's right of way over cars.

So what is it to be, which of the experts have got it right? More of the same with the prevalence of diabetes continuing to increase or a world in which type 2 diabetes is eliminated and type 1 diabetes becomes effectively managed?

The difference in these two scenarios really comes down to you. Or perhaps you and Barak Obama.

Barak Obama is president of the United States today because they couldn't find any white guys to do the job. Let me ask you this. Who was that guy who stood against Obama? See six months after the election you can't even remember his name. The only real contender was a woman. It is no coincidence that a woman and an African American were the leading contenders for the US Presidency.

In the past white guys could play the hero when there was just one crisis to contend with. Abraham Lincoln was a hero because he sorted out the Civil War. Franklin Roosevelt sorted out the depression and then after that he sorted out, along with Winston Churchill, the Second World War. All white men. Not blacks and not women. But when we are faced with not one, but three crisis all at once : world recession, global warming and the terrorist threat, all the white guys' duck for cover and leave the mess to ordinary folks who have had to personally deal with real crisis in their lives.

Women, African people and other groups in society who have historically been excluded from positions of power have for 250 years been the leaders, outside the political mainstream, of those movements which have made this world a better place for ordinary people. The white guys have generally made things better for themselves and their mates.

The primary vehicle for ordinary people to change the world has been civil society. The rise of civil society began in the eighteenth century with the establishment of the anti-slavery movement.

By Civil Society I am referring to all those organisations we call community groups, voluntary associations, sport and recreation groups, arts and culture groups, conservation and environmental associations, international development organisations. 97,000 of them in New Zealand alone.

I prefer the term civil society rather than not for profits or non governmental organisations with their negative connotations. Civil Society refers to ordinary people working for a common purpose. "Civil" means ordinary and "society" refers to a collective of people distinguishable from a crowd or mob by its commitment to a specific purpose.

Let me just briefly talk about the eighteenth century anti slavery movement because it is the prototype of civil society organisations including Diabetes New Zealand.

The movement for the abolition of slavery marks the beginnings of the quiet revolution based on Universal Justice. The enormity of the task undertaken by this movement is difficult for us to appreciate today precisely because we now regard slavery as entirely, morally reprehensible. This is the critical achievement of this movement.

It was during the eighteenth century that modern democratic states were first established following the over-throw of the monarchy. However these were representative democracies which from the outset excluded the participation of huge sectors of society. Most obviously women, but also African people, other minorities', religious dissenters and those who had no land or other property. In other words representative democracy largely excluded ordinary people and those at the margins of society.

Life for ordinary people was rapidly changing due to industrialisation, migration and urbanisation. The issues faced by ordinary people were generally ignored by governments made up largely of white, privileged males.

But the notions of democracy, human rights, justice, and equality were not confined to the privileged classes. Ordinary people also embraced these concepts and sought to shape a better world through their own efforts. The first example was the Anti-Slavery movement. Ordinary people began to see African people who had been enslaved as human beings with human rights.

During the eighteenth century it is estimated that 5.8 million African people were shipped to the New World as slaves. Between 1662 and 1807 (when the trade was outlawed) 3.4 million African people were enslaved by British slave traders. This was 3-4 times the number of voluntary British settlers in the New World. (Jay, p. 239)

In 1775 The Society for the relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully held in Bondage was established. In 1787 the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed. In 1791 there was a slave revolt which eventually resulted in the founding of Haiti. In

1795 in France, the Declaration of the Rights of Man included the abolition of slavery. In 1807 the British Parliament passed the Slave Trade Act effectively outlawing but not abolishing slavery. Britain abolished slavery in 1838 and other countries followed.

In a statement of 1823, the recently founded Liverpool Society for the Abolition of Slavery attributed its unprecedented success in achieving moral “improvement” to “the practice of combining society itself in intellectual masses, for the purpose of attaining some certain, defined, and acknowledged good, which is generally allowed to be essential to the well-being of the whole.” (Taylor pp395-396)

The “combining of society” for the purpose of achieving “acknowledged good” and “essential to the well-being of the whole” constitutes civil society.

Characteristics of the anti-slavery movement which continue to characterise civil society in contemporary society include:

- Non Hierarchical: Traditional charity implies a hierarchical social order while the anti slavery movement was based on equality and inclusion. The movement included African people themselves in leadership roles. Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano, both African people, were among the most prominent people involved in the movement.
- Bottom up: Ordinary people, hence civil society, organised themselves rather than relying on the good will of the rich and powerful.
- Participatory: The movement established small local committees, held community meetings and lectures, distributed pamphlets and submitted petitions all of which enabled the participation of the public including those otherwise excluded from the political process. These are all familiar methods of organisation today but were very revolutionary at the time.
- Rights Based: Universal rights were seen as extending to all people based on our shared humanity rather than on privilege or property.
- Anti-establishment: This movement challenged the state, commercial interests and established moral authority; the churches. These challenges were on moral grounds and were not an attempt to replace the politicians, nor destroy commercial enterprise. What they sought to do was to change the laws and commercial practices based on a vision of the good which required the recognition in law and in the market of universal rights.

The Anti-Slavery movement therefore provided the foundations over time of the human rights and civil rights movements, the women’s movement, the movement of people with disabilities and the promotion of gay and lesbians rights.

A similar story can be elucidated in respect of the eighteenth century Romantic Movement and the subsequent development of the environmental and conservation movements. Universal Justice, environmental consciousness and charity are the pillars of modern civil society.

But these movements did not go unchallenged and these challenges remain in contemporary society.

If Diabetes New Zealand is to change the world, a world in which diabetes 2 no longer exists and diabetes 1 is effectively managed as suggested in one of the scenarios presented, you will I suggest need to heed the lessons of history.

Based on 250 years of history I would make the following observations for your consideration.

- Your organisation must be Non Hierarchical which means being more than a traditional charity. Traditional charity assumes a hierarchical society. Charities are a means of the wealthy providing for the poor and downtrodden. But traditional charity does not challenge unequal power relationships in society, rather it tends to reinforce the status quo and lacks commitment to universal justice and equality.
- Your organisation must strive to reach out to ordinary people rather than relying on the rich and powerful including governments and funders. In fact you must be prepared to challenge funders on moral grounds.
- It must be participatory, placing a high level of importance on even the smallest of your committees. It must seek to include those who are currently excluded. This is particularly important given the prevalence of diabetes among the most disadvantaged sectors of our community.
- Your organisation must be rights based. This is a lesson hard learned by the disability movement, women's and gay rights activists. Charity is not good enough. We must have universal access to health, education, meaningful work and income support as needed.
- Finally it must be anti-establishment, a particularly challenging notion I realise. The alternative is to accept the status quo in which case the vision of a world without ever rising rates of diabetes will be lost. I will return to this point in a moment.

Such an organisation will face severe challenges not least of which will come from within your own organisation.

Over the last several years I have been privileged to be involved in CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizens Participation. Another example of the legacy of the anti slavery movement. CIVICUS has member organisations from over 110 countries.

I chair a small committee with members from 55 countries. Among my colleagues on this committee is Consuelo Castro from Mexico, Oyebisi Oluseyi from Nigeria, Meraj Khan from Pakistan and Sixto Donato Macasaet from the Phillipines.

Consuelo has been campaigning for ten years to get the equivalent of a Charities Law in Mexico. Oyebisi has been part of a campaign in Nigeria to establish a Freedom of Information Bill. Meraj has been one of the civil society leaders resisting the Pakistan government's proposal to enact the Social Welfare Agencies Control Act of 1994, whose provisions allowed state interference and control of NGO affairs and severely limited the independence and operating space of NGOs. Sixto's organisation has been tackling corruption among elected officials and in promoting civil society's right to monitor the disbursement of public funds. The project entailed training volunteers in

116 congressional districts to monitor elected representative's use of discretionary funds for stated purposes.

From our workshops held at the World Assembly in Glasgow over the last two years we have, identified 5 Common Threats faced by civil society organisations not with standing the very different issues they are trying to address as well as the tremendous differences in terms of culture, economic development and political structures.

Risks To Civil Society

1. Challenging the credibility of your organisation and its activities.
2. Challenging the legality of your organisation or its activities
3. Corrupting your organisations strategic position and its resources
4. Interventions at an operational level
5. Illegal interventions.

When we initially received this report I thought, well these threats might be real in countries like Mexico, Nigeria and the Philippines, but are they really relevant to little ol' NZ ?

So let's consider these threats in terms of Diabetes New Zealand if it were to pursue a vision for 2025 as described by Dr Rod Jackson and Dr Robyn Toomath. By my assessment you will need to challenge government and politicians, the advertising industry, food and drinks manufactures, supermarkets and food retailers generally, school boards, employers and those who control the availability of foods in the work place, the transportation industry, local government, the diet industry, pharmaceutical industry and their allies in the medical establishment who receive huge amounts of funding directed towards finding a cure for just about everything. Then with the backlash you'll have to challenge your funders and the general media when you come under attack for promoting such unrealistic expectations in the general populace. And those are just the challenges that come to mind from someone who is not particularly well informed on the topic.

How will these challenges manifest themselves? Let's look at our list from our international experience.

Challenging the credibility of your organisation and its activities.

- In the 1990's when a number of organisations including the NZ Council of Christian Social Services challenged the government's policies in the face of rising poverty these organisations came under severe attack in parliament and from government questioning their credibility and their right to challenge the government. Five organisations were threatened with withdrawal of funding. Your organisation could be accused of being misguided, not understanding the issues involved, wanting something for nothing, not in touch with reality. We have heard all of this and it can be very damaging. Your credibility could be challenged.

- If your organisation were to seek to increase public knowledge on matters relating to sexual activity and impotency, serious concerns relating to diabetes, you could easily find yourself the subject of a very nasty campaign from the religious right particularly if such activities were to involve the schools. And of course the media loves to sensationalise such issues. Again funding could be threatened.
- Consider the furore over attempts to have certain foods removed from school cafeterias and tuck shops. Vigorous attempts were made to discredit those advocating for healthy foods in schools. So think what you could face when challenging the food industry, supermarkets, restaurants and your corner dairy on these issues.

Challenging the legality of your organisation or its activities

- The activity whose legality is most likely to be challenged is advocacy. Remember the experiences of the Smoke Free Coalition and the Anti Obesity Coalition. Attacks in Parliament and attempts by the Ministry of Health to prevent advocacy on issues of better health.
- In addition there is the threat posed by the new Charities Act which could see your charitable status removed were you seen to be participating primarily in advocacy activities.
- In addition, the Charities Commission reserves the right to vet officers of your organisation to determine if they are suitable to hold office in your organisation. Another potential threat.

Corrupting your organisations strategic position and its resources

- Typically this has occurred through the contracting for services regime. Governments determine what is to be delivered and organisations accept the terms of the contract even where they know the services being purchased may be ineffective compared to services they themselves wish to see funded. Similarly clients have identified what they actually need but receive what others have determined they will get. Services are often underfunded and can not possibly achieve the desired outcome. These relationships undermine the integrity of the organisations and distort their mission and purpose over time and ultimately their legitimacy in terms of the communities they serve.
- In addition organisations are prepared to alter their constitutions in order to obtain charitable status. For example references to advocacy or campaigning activities are removed from their constitutions, or defined as “incidental” to core services.
- Organisations accepting positions on working parties or engaging in endless consultation exercises can also have a corrupting influence on organisations where they know such activities will serve no useful purpose in terms of the interests of the community. These exercises are often excuses for doing nothing but can undermine your organisation’s integrity if you are seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Interventions at an operational level

- Governments may refuse access to public information or heavily edit information before it is made public.
- Alternatively organisations may be forced to provide confidential information or data obtained through the trust of clients. This information may be entirely unnecessary for reporting or accountability purposes.
- Departments may refuse to negotiate in good faith.
- Departments may intentionally favour one organisation over another in order to cause divisions within the community.
- Parliament may be used to attack individuals and organisations on entirely spurious grounds with no opportunity for public redress.

Illegal interventions.

- The most serious examples in New Zealand of illegal interventions were the so called anti-terrorism raids of October 2007. It should be noted that the seventeen people arrested were members of a range of civil society organisations including environmental groups, student activists, anarchists, community action organisations and Maori organisations. These organisations were under surveillance for 18 months to 2 years and you can be sure these were not the only organisations being secretly investigated. The anti-terrorism related charges were subsequently dismissed by the Attorney General implying that in fact these activities by the security services were illegal.
- In addition we also know that security organisations keep files on community organisation leaders as evident from the cases of MP's Keith Locke and Sue Bradford. Again, these cases makes it quite clear that civil society leaders are actively spied on in this country.
- Just as worrying is the potential use of information obtained without our knowledge such as leaks to the press or to potential employers or funders.

These threats to civil society organisations occur around the globe and New Zealand is no exception, regrettably. The degree of intimidation varies from country to country and from crisis to crisis. But these threats are a consequence of the willingness of ordinary people to stand up for themselves and for the kind of fair and just society they believe is possible.

This has become the fundamental role of civil society. To articulate our beliefs, moral principals and vision of the good society and to constantly and persistently challenge the status quo and those interests who most benefit from our collective failure to address the issues of poverty, injustice and the environmental degradation of the planet upon which we all depend.

I wish you all the very best as you seek to do your part for a better tomorrow for people with diabetes their families and our future.