

How Neighborhoods Make Us Sick *Restoring Health and Wellness to Our Communities*

Available January 15, 2019 | \$17, 240 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4557-6

Veronica Squires is chief administrative officer at The Good Samaritan Health Center in Atlanta, Georgia, where she leads fundraising strategy and development efforts. She is a certified CCDA practitioner and serves on the advisory board for the Georgia Charitable Care Network.

Breanna Lathrop is chief operating officer and a family nurse practitioner for Good Samaritan Health Center. She earned her doctor of nursing practice from Georgia Southern University and a master of public health and a master of nursing from Emory University.

Everyone deserves the opportunity for good health.

Without yet knowing each other, authors Squires and Lathrop each spent a decade deeply entrenched in serving impoverished Atlanta neighborhoods—Squires on the southwest side in community redevelopment, and Lathrop on the southeast side in a clinic treating uninsured families. Even while both worked to improve the lives of their neighbors and patients they noticed a discouraging trend—the difficult neighborhood environments were causing human languishing and there was no easy cure.

The purpose of How Neighborhoods Make Us Sick is to describe, both for those familiar and unfamiliar with impoverished urban communities, why these neighborhoods are making people sick and what it would take to transform them into places that promote health equity. Through personal experiences, the authors describe social determinants and illustrate their effect on health. The book points to field experts and local leaders, describing best practices across the country, and offers practical steps toward improving community health.

Their book offers an approachable, Christ-centered vision for health equity, challenging readers to rethink issues affecting inner cities and engage personally and collectively to improve health outcomes for these neighborhoods.

What are some of the unique factors your book offers people working in communities experiencing these issues?

Squires and Lathrop:

- *A new perspective for improving poor neighborhoods*—Rather than expect the poor to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” we show that the challenges and biases the poor face disproportionately cause illness and poor health outcomes requiring significant resources to restore their health and provide avenues for healing.
- *A new understanding*—Social determinants inform us that it is not simply the very poor who suffer due to inequities in education, socioeconomic status, food access, and employment. Social determinants operate on a gradient, meaning that impacting social determinants benefits entire communities from very low income to middle class.
- *A new approach*—Because the challenges of poor neighborhoods are deep and complex, it takes more than the approach of just “moving in” and being present to make a difference. Transformative change requires significant skills or services, delivered in smart partnerships, to really deliver outcomes for the poor. The results obtained from moving in are not enough. People should move in certainly, but we also need to address the social determinants of health.
- *A new language*—Most literature about the social determinants of health is very academic and not widely read in the general population. Our book makes this concept accessible through common language and real-life experiences.

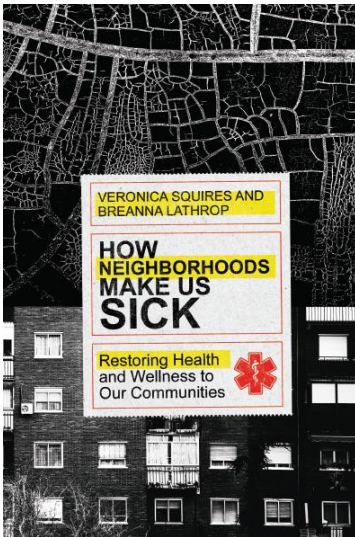


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- *An emphasis on local needs and “mission work”*—There are huge needs domestically, and in many cases they exist just miles away from us. We call for a renewed focus on giving and advocacy at home, in our own backyards.
- *A spiritual perspective*—We center on God’s love for this world and the model Jesus set in his ministry of healing and dismantling systems of oppression. We participate in the kingdom of God when we engage in this type of work.
- *A call to change*—We provide specific examples of ways that individuals can make a meaningful impact in their communities and call on readers to consider how they can use their influence, skills, and resources to move communities toward health equity.

What are some concrete takeaways readers might have after going through your book?

Squires and Lathrop:

- All people want, need, and deserve a safe, healthy place to live, work, play, and raise their families.
- Poor neighborhoods are sick because social determinants of health contribute to health status and life expectancy.
- It’s an injustice that someone’s ZIP code (more so than their genetic code) should dictate their lifespan and quality of life.
- We can all make a difference by working collaboratively in our respective spheres to answer the question, “What will make our neighbors healthy?”
- God loves this world, and pursuing health equity in our communities is a way of responding to God’s love.

* * *

“Framed expertly in terms of the macrolevel social determinants of health and the gap in life expectancy between poor neighborhoods and wealthier ones, this heartfelt first-person account by two staff members of Atlanta’s Good Samaritan Health Center makes vivid the microlevel daily pain and struggles of those who live in poverty. It also outlines an activist, social justice approach to making the changes that have to be made with and by community members, in order for neighborhoods to produce health, and not harm, to their residents.”

—**Ellen Idler**, director of the Religion and Public Health Collaborative, Emory University



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