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## Research Article

### CUBAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM: A STRATEGIC MODEL FOR THE RESISTIVE ECONOMY

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#### ABSTRACT

Nowadays with increasing tensions between the countries and rising of right wing politicians in former liberal countries in response to the neoliberal globalization agenda and its devastating effects, most countries want keep their sovereignty and become self-sufficient and somehow bring upon the resistive economy. Cuba, having a health status similar to the first world nations despite bearing the longest embargo in the history has done a brilliant and outstanding job in healthcare and can be a great model for the resistive economy and the countries under embargo. This paper tends to illustrate Cuban healthcare system as a role model for the resistive economy and a mean to achieve the goals in healthcare sector despite being under severe pressure.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the globalization agenda has reached its peak and is beginning to fall after such events like Brexit, the presidency of Donald Trump and rising of right wing politicians in former liberal countries (RT, 2016). In this situation by rising the tensions most of the countries tend to concentrate on self-sufficiency rather than trying to depend on others and somehow try to bring upon the resistive economy (New York Times, 2016). Cuba, one of the few communist countries survived by having an amazing efficient and effective health system despite bearing the longest embargo right after its socialist revolution in the history can be a role model for countries tending toward self-sufficiency in healthcare sector (Gary Clyde Hufbauer *et al*, 2011, Greene, 2003, Keck and Reed, 2012). Prior to the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Cuba's health-care provision followed a market-led model of healthcare (Demers, 1993), with healthcare services that were representative of third world health provision. There was suboptimal distribution of its doctors, the majority of whom were in cities such as Havana and Santiago de Cuba, which left significant numbers of people without access to health care. The idea of a national health system to reduce disparity and introduce universal care for Cuba began in 1960 by the revolutionary and physician Che Guevara. In his famous speech On Revolutionary Medicine, he said that the work of the Ministry of Health and other similar organisations was threefold: (i) to provide public health services for the greatest

possible number of persons; (ii) to institute a program of preventive medicine; (iii) to orient the public to the performance of hygienic practices (Guevara C. 1968). Thus, the goal was to establish a unified national health service that would be available to the population of the 14 provinces. By 1961 the government had introduced measures which included a reduction in the cost of medicines, nationalisation of pharmaceutical companies, mutual aid co-operatives and private hospitals, as well as widening the network of hospitals so that the Cuban healthcare system was a totally socialist one (Mesa-Lago, 2000). It's astonishing to say that Cuba, despite bearing the longest embargo in the history not only never confronted financial problems the world has for funding healthcare sector but also staffed one of the highest ratios of doctors per population in the world and neither implemented structural adjustment policies we see today being implemented by countries which face financial problems (Feinsilver, 1993, Delgado, 1998, Preker and Harding, 2003, Lieberman *et al*, 2005, world health statistics, 2016). These facts have led researchers and writers citing Cuban healthcare system as "the black swan" or "the curious one" or "the Cuban paradox" (Spiegel and Yassi, 2004). This study tries to illustrate Cuban healthcare system as a significant strategic model for the resistive economy through 2 material indicators of "efficiency and effectiveness" and two moral indicators of "equity and ethics". After showing the position of Cuban healthcare system in such indicators a scientific and numerical conclusion would be asserted and the author would show the very reason why the

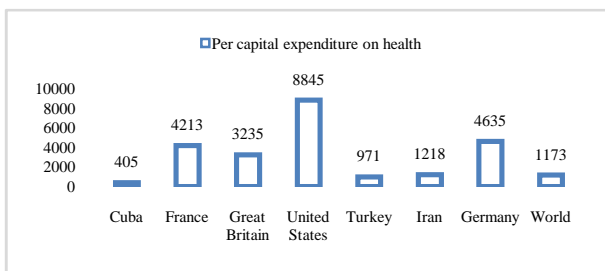
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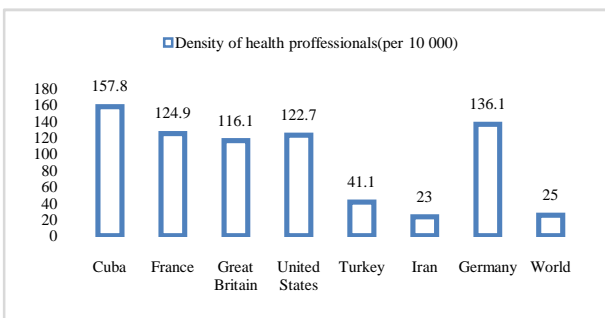
Cuban healthcare system would be a significant model for the resistive economy.

**Efficiency and effectiveness**

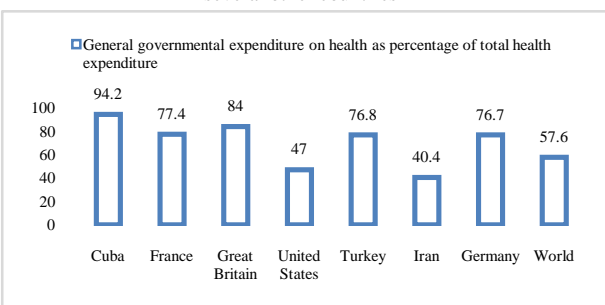
Most of the scholars in the healthcare sector assess the legitimacy of healthcare systems by their efficiency and effectiveness. Countries all around the world have been long searching for more efficient and effective ways to handle their healthcare sectors, for this very reason they have implemented structural adjustment programs designed by IMF and world bank to get more efficiency and effectiveness but not only haven't got the results they wanted but also in some cases they got to a threatening position! in contrast Cuba while having one of the highest overall healthcare indicators in the world despite having one of the lowest per capita expenditures is neither a member of the World Bank nor a member of the IMF and have never used these adjustments (World Health Statistics, 2016). This makes it even more remarkable that the country was praised by the World Bank President, James Wolfensohn who acknowledged that 'Cuba has done a great job on education and health' (IPS 2001). One of the great contributors of the efficient and effective Cuban healthcare system is its focus on prevention and preventive approaches. It has been shown that preventive approaches are far efficient and more effective in long term than curative ones (Maciosek et al, 2010).



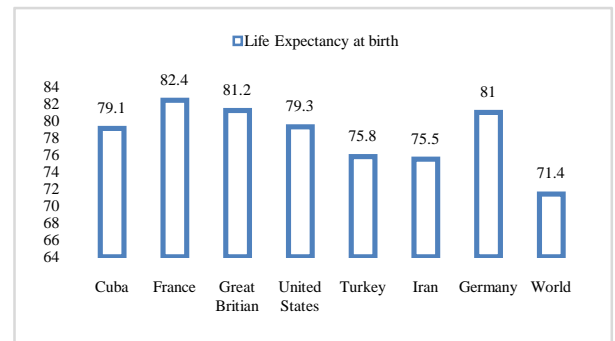
**Table 1** comparison of per capita expenditure on health between Cuba and several other countries



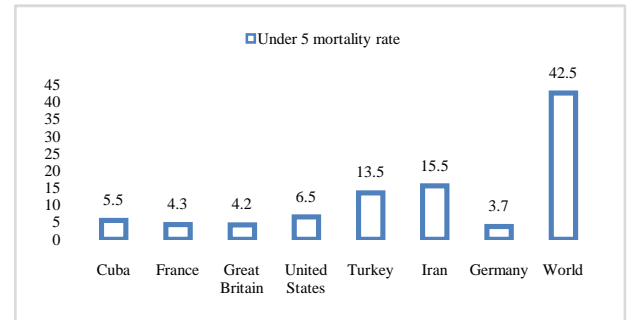
**Table 2** comparison of density of health professionals between Cuba and several other countries



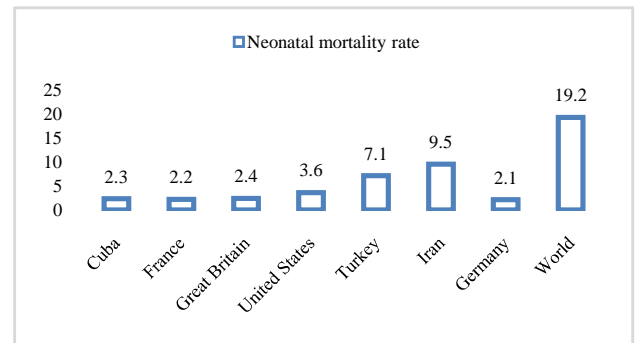
**Table 3** comparison of general governmental expenditure on health as percentage of total health expenditure between Cuba and several other countries



**Table 4** comparison of life expectancy at birth between Cuba and several other countries



**Table 5** comparison of Under 5 mortality rate between Cuba and several other countries



**Table 6** comparison of Neonatal mortality rate between Cuba and several other countries

As tables above show Cuba has a significant efficiency by only spending 405 dollars on healthcare per capita which is amazingly half of what Turkey and one third of what Iran spends on! (Table 1). In terms of effectiveness the health indicators of Cuba not only surpass Turkey and Iran, but also is on par with countries spending much higher on healthcare per capita like United States and Great Britain! (Table 1, 4, 5, 6). As mentioned earlier, one of key contributors of such efficiency and effectiveness for Cuba is her resistive approach towards the structural adjustment policies of world bank and IMF despite bearing harsh times for more than 5 decades due to the embargo and more importantly losing her close allies after the collapse of the eastern block specially the Soviet Union (Nayeri and Lopez-Pardo, 2005). As table 2 shows density of healthcare professionals in Cuba is one of the highest in the world and as the table 3 illustrates most of the expenditure in the Cuban healthcare system is governmental and just a small amount (nearly 6 percent) is spent by the private institutions and people themselves which is in fact due to the high number of health tourists traveling Cuba for its cheap and high quality

healthcare services whose services are not supported by the government.

### Equity and ethics

Remarkably, Cuba is now providing assistance to other Latin American countries whose health systems have collapsed or are in serious trouble (De Vos 2005). Achieving world-class indicators with just a small amount of money has been a significant achievement for Cuba, but the most significant achievement of Cuban healthcare system isn't its efficiency or effectiveness but its free healthcare for all the citizens and its medical internationalism (Feinsilver, 1993). Some may argue that Cuban revolution hasn't achieved any remarkable growth and their first world health status are nothing new and they have had this status well before their revolution, but the point is that before the revolution there were notable differences between the urban and rural sectors. In the last four decades, the Cuban government has successfully reduced those gaps. For example in 1959 there was only 1 rural hospital; by 1989 there were 64. In addition, Cuba has been able to maintain and even raise many of its health indicators to levels comparable to those of industrialized nations (Sixto, 2002). Overcoming severe limitations of access to health care and preventive medicine was a major goal starting in 1959; infant mortality dropped dramatically. Training doctors was a priority. Medical diplomacy sending health professionals abroad shaped the country's international profile. Establishing "polyclinics" in the 1960s-1970s helped bring specialty medicine to underserved areas; starting in 1984, family physicians and nurses who lived and worked in neighborhoods became central (Pérez, 2008). The other thing that has made Cuba exceptional in healthcare sector is that within Cuba and abroad, health is a major symbol of the revolution and means of projecting Cuba as "a world medical power" (Feinsilver, 1993; Eckstein, 1994). Cuba is quoted to have more doctors working abroad on humanitarian missions than the World Health Organization which is an incredible fact showing how ethics and solidarity is important for the Cuban healthcare system (Aitsiselmi, 2003). Since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Cuba has sent thousands of medical personnel overseas particularly to Latin America, Africa and, more recently, Oceania and of bringing medical students and patients to Cuba (Prensa Latina, 2008). In 2007, "Cuba has 42,000 workers in international collaborations in 103 different countries, of whom more than 30,000 are health personnel, including no fewer than 19,000 physicians." (Huish and Kirk, 2007). Cuba provides more medical personnel to the developing world than all the G8 countries combined (Huish and Kirk, 2007). Moreover it is widely believed that medical workers are Cuba's most important export commodity (Foreign Affairs, 2010, P.69).

### CONCLUSION

Regarding the facts mentioned, Cuba has done an outstanding job in achieving her goals in healthcare with just a small amount of money which has made her healthcare system of the most efficient and effective systems in the world. The amazing fact is that Cuba hasn't limited her efforts to achieve materialistic goals and has tried significantly to fulfil her idealistic views of healthcare as a right and internationalism. These facts easily make Cuba an outstanding model for the resistive economies all around the world who want to have a

cost-effective healthcare system which not only ensures their materialistic virtues but also fulfils idealistic ones.

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