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The social determinants of health and health inequalities – Can we consider the causes of the causes?

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This presentation will review the state of the art of knowledge on the social determinants of health and health inequalities, discussing the following issues: What can be learned from studying the epidemiologic patterns, including international comparisons as well as the patterning of social inequalities in health within countries? Beyond documenting associations, what do we know about causation? Is it biologically plausible that macro-determinants such as income or wealth, education, or racial inequality, could have important effects on health and health inequalities? Why has public health tended to focus on proximate causes of ill health, such as smoking, diet, and exercise, rather than on more fundamental causes? Do we have adequate evidence to support interventions targeting macro-determinants as components of a health strategy, particularly given the current global economic crisis?