Improving the quality of life of African women through better health care remains a daunting task. Over the years, creative methods of intervention have met with notable but varying degrees of success among countries. The primary health care (PHC) package enunciated at Alma Ata in 1978 and ratified by most African governments, still occupies a privileged position as the preferred answer to the health problems faced by women. In addition, it is increasingly seen as a key to their empowerment. However, PHC has also had an undesirable – but perhaps avoidable – effect of placing a premium on women with whom its success is supposed to rest. As the African disease burden further increases, women continue to bear the brunt of being community care providers. This presentation examines some of these processes and argues that the problem stems partly from the gender interpretations of PHC that have flourished for many years. This has resulted in affecting public opinion in ways that have helped consign women to the sick room. The seminar is part of WHO's newly-launched African Health History initiative.

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