

EDITOR'S CHOICE



It Takes Lawyers to Deliver Health Care

We begin this issue on “Policies and Programs to Advance Public Health” with several calls for deeper understanding of the social, historical, and environmental contexts of people’s lives to more effectively meet their particular needs, including Borrell’s conceptual model of racial identity to better understand the health implications among diverse Hispanic subgroups and Nemoto and colleagues’ efforts to create a safe space for providing transgender women with tailored health education.

As I write this column, an undersea earthquake has just sent tsunamis crashing into the heavily populated shorelines of more than 10 countries in Asia and East Africa. While the extent of the devastation is only beginning to be known, the urgency of the unprecedented relief effort needed to stave off disease and homelessness among the survivors is palpable around the world. Health and sanitation programs are sorely needed to relieve both short- and long-term suffering in myriad affected communities. Better disaster preparedness policies may help prevent future catastrophes or at the very least limit their terrible tolls.

In the effort to create effective policies and programs to address social disparities in health, allies outside the health sector are crucial. Those in the law profession are highlighted here. For the first time in the Journal’s 95-year history, 2 members of the editorial team are lawyers: Sofia Gruskin, JD, MIA, who covers health and human rights, and Stewart J. Landers, JD, MCP, who covers lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health.

The dramatic declines in youth smoking accelerated by the truth campaign (see Farrelly et al. in this issue) were made possible through years of advocacy by the public health community that resulted in the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement (MSA). The MSA resolved lawsuits filed by attorneys general in 46 states and 5 US territories against the tobacco industry. While the MSA largely concerned states’ health expenses, lawsuits on

other important topics (e.g., consumer fraud) are ongoing in many states. The Citizens’ Commission to Protect the Truth—which includes all the former US secretaries of health, former US surgeons general, and former directors of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—has been formed to help ensure the continuation of the truth campaign by advocating for its sustained financial support through the Public Education Fund now that the legal mandate has passed (see <http://www.protectthetruth.org>).

The effectiveness of lawyers in advancing public health is evidenced by Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS), an initiative created 20 years ago by the Association of the Bar of the City of New York following massive cutbacks in federal funding for legal services for the poor. VOLS identifies areas of legal need, creates projects to meet these needs, and recruits and trains lawyers to provide the necessary legal services. According to Yvonne Pradier of Harlem Hospital Center, “As the social worker who is constantly in touch with the patients, [I know] they are appreciative of the legal assistance provided to them.” The firm of LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae has been invaluable to her in addressing complex family needs involving housing, immigration, disability, and child welfare. And Marc Crawford Leavitt, JD—a partner of Leavitt, Kerson & Duane—is a member of the Oral Health for Older Americans Program of the School of Dental and Oral Surgery of Columbia University, an interdisciplinary team that is working to promote oral health and health care for our nation’s seniors. To sum it up in a bumper-sticker phrase, “It Takes Lawyers to Deliver Health Care.” ■

Mary E. Northridge, PhD, MPH
Editor-in-Chief

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Mary E. Northridge, PhD, MPH

TECHNICAL DEPUTY EDITOR Jennifer A. Ellis, PhD

FEATURE EDITOR Gabriel N. Stover, MPA

ASSOCIATE EDITORS Mary Bassett, MD, MPH

Michael R. Greenberg, PhD

Sofia Gruskin, JD, MIA

Deborah Holtzman, PhD, MSW

Said Ibrahim, MD, MPH

Sherman A. James, PhD

Stewart J. Landers, JD, MCP

Robert Sember

Stella M. Yu, ScD, MPH

Roger Vaughan, DrPH, MS

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Daniel Tarantola, MD (Geneva, Switzerland)

Cesar Gomes Victora, MD, PhD (Pelotas, Brazil)

DEPARTMENT EDITORS John Colmers, MPH

Government, Politics, and Law

Elizabeth Fee, PhD, and Theodore M. Brown, PhD

Images of Health

Public Health Then and Now

Voices From the Past

Bernard M. Dickens, PhD

Health Policy and Ethics Forum

Kenneth R. McLeroy, PhD

Public Health Matters

EDITORIAL BOARD

M. Lyndon Haviland, DrPH (2005), Chair

Frank J. Chaloupka, PhD (2006)

Vanessa Northington Gamble, MD, PhD (2006)

Michael D. Kogan, PhD (2007)

Linda Young Landesman, DrPH, MSW (2006)

Bruce Lubotsky Levin, DrPh, MPH (2005)

Marsha D. Lillie-Blanton, DrPH (2007)

Kusuma Madamala, MPH (2006)

Neil Hann, MPH, CHES (2007)

Gregory Pappas, MD, PhD (2005)

Allan Steckler, DrPH (2006)

Henrie M. Treadwell, PhD (2005)

Terrie F. Wetle, PhD (2007)

Siu G. Wong, OD, MPH (2007)

Ruth E. Zambrana, PhD (2005)

STAFF

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP

Executive Director/Publisher

Ellen T. Meyer, *Director of Publications*

Nancy Johnson, MA, *Executive Editor*

Dave Stockhoff, MA, *Production Editor*

Noëlle A. Boughanmi, *Associate Production Editor*

Cynthia Calgano, *Assistant Production Editor*

Ashell Alston, *Director of Advertising*

Tara Kelly, *Graphic Designer*

Heather Wildrick, *Editorial Assistant*

Jim Richardson, *Subscriptions Coordinator*

Joan M. Fuller, *Reviews Coordinator*

FREELANCE STAFF Janis Foster, Greg Edmondson,

Gary Norton, Frank Higgins, Jan Martin,

Gretchen Becker, Alisa Guerson,

Chrysa Cullather, *Copyeditors*

Rebecca Richters, *Editorial Proofreader*

Alison Moore, Chris Filiatreau, *Proofreaders*

Vanessa Sifford, Michele Pryor, *Graphic Designers*

Aleisha Kropf, *Image Consultant*