

Reflections Over the Decades – 45 Years in Public Health

As I complete my 45th year in public health here in the U.S. (the last 10 at Jefferson), I have often been asked what has maintained my passion for public health as a career and profession. My response is three-fold: 1) the incredible work we do in public health to help people and their families live a healthy, productive and rewarding life where they work, study, and play, 2) the noble values we hold of social justice, human rights, and eliminating inequities and disparities, and 3) the enjoyment, affinity, and love we feel with our colleagues, working on shared goals to improve the lives of the people we serve.

Looking back over the past decade, so many thoughts come to mind. I recall the unusual beginning when I received a call from a faculty colleague at the Drexel School of Public Health, (Wendy Voet, MPH), who casually mentioned she heard about an open position for a public health program director at Jefferson. I didn't know much about Jefferson, except that it was the designated medical school for Delaware. I had also visited the campus a few years prior when I was at Christiana Care Health System and was referred to a physician in Family and Community Medicine at Jefferson to talk about public health and medicine. That doctor was James Plumb, MD, MPH (Director of Jefferson's Center for Urban Health) and the family doctor who referred me was Janice Nevin, MD, MPH (now President and CEO of Christiana). I hadn't thought about leaving Drexel but decided to inquire. Jennifer Ravelli, MPH, answered that call. She mentioned that Jefferson had a small Master of Science of Public Health (MSPH) program in their College of Graduate Studies, and that it was in the midst of an organizational transition and planning to hire its first full-time program director. After a brief conversation about the program, its mission, students and faculty, and a little about my public health background, I asked about



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the application deadline. There was a long pause and finally Jennifer responded that the deadline was closing but if I could submit my application soon, it would be reviewed. I thought about submitting it by the end of the week, when Jennifer asked if I could submit an application . . . *immediately*. I submitted my application in the next hour. The next day, I received a call for a meeting with David Nash, MD, MBA, who at that time was the Chair of the Department of Health Policy at Jefferson Medical College. We met two days later at Suburban Station on a stormy spring day in 2007. We sat on a bench talking about Jefferson and its recently approved strategic plan by then-President Robert Barchi, MD, PhD to create a new School of Population Health. Dr. Nash mentioned how the MSPH program would be an integral part and the signature program of this new school.

Initially, the MSPH program was located in the Jefferson College of Graduate Studies (JCGS). We re-designed the curriculum to an MPH and expanded the required credits from 38 to 40 and then to 42 to meet the Council of Public

Health (CEPH) requirements for national accreditation. During this transition, I credit the following individuals for moving our program forward: James Keen, PhD; Gerry Grunwald, PhD, Dennis Gross, PhD, Robert Bartosz, Eleanor Gorman, Jennifer Ravelli, MPH and Lisa Chosed, MA. In 2008, Caroline Golab, PhD was hired and helped lead the organizational and strategic plans for the new school and provided tremendous support to get the MPH program accredited in 2009 as the new School of Population Health "opened its doors" to students.

There have been so many wonderful memories through the years. Some of the highlights for me included:

- The growth and development of the MPH program with new faculty and competency-based curriculum along with our outstanding students and alumni. It has been so meaningful to see our students grow as public health professionals and hear about their successes as alumni. I continue to be amazed by our students.

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- Our collaboration with a wide range of public and private community organizations such as: the [Philadelphia Department of Public Health](#); [Public Health Management Corporation](#); [Health Care Improvement Foundation](#); [College of Physicians Section on Public Health](#); [The Food Trust](#); [Maternity Care Coalition](#); and the MPH Community Advisory Board. I am also very grateful for the many collaborators and partners within Jefferson, including the Department of Family and Community Medicine, and the Jefferson Center for Urban Health.
- Our professional meetings such as our monthly Forums, Population Health Colloquium, special professional meetings and events including our class nights, semi-annual JCPH faculty meetings and various professional presentations, our fun and joyous holiday celebrations, social gatherings, community service projects, etc.
- Successful completion of two program accreditations with CEPH in 2009 and 2016, knowing the hard work put in by so many people.
- Collaboration with other universities on initiatives such as Community Driven Research Day, celebration of Public Health Week, partnerships with other graduate and undergraduate institutions

and programs as formalized through our articulation agreements.

- Our collaboration with Philadelphia University, College of Architecture + Built Environment and their Design program, and their College of Science, Health, and Liberal Arts and various programs that will be linked with our MPH program. We have only been engaged with them for just over a year yet it feels that we have been *family* for a decade and of course, we will be family as a single university in the near future.

The future is very bright for the Jefferson College of Population Health and the MPH program. With new leadership under Associate Dean Billy Oglesby, PhD, MSPH, FACHE, and my successor Rosemary Frasso, PhD, MSc, CPH, and our great faculty, students, staff and alumni, the MPH program will reach new heights and take on increased importance and relevance in our region.

To add to this amazing time in my life, I honestly can't think of a more fantastic pre-retirement send off than by being recognized by the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) with their highest award of [Distinguished Fellow](#) as well as College of Physicians of Philadelphia Section on Public Health and Preventive Medicine,

2017 Individual Recognition Award. I'm so touched and honored by these recognitions.

I want to thank everyone in the College and the University for an enjoyable and productive decade for me. In particular, I want to single out JCPH leadership, David Nash, Caroline Golab, Alexis Skoufalos, Neil Goldfarb, David Glatter and our program directors over the years for their dedication and support of public health and our program. A special thanks to our administrative staff over the decade who has helped make the MPH program and my job so much easier. And a sincere thanks to all our faculty, not solely those in our College, but colleagues like Rickie Brawer, Jim Plumb, Rich Pepino, and all our adjunct faculty from throughout Philadelphia.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Roselena, who has been my *soul mate* and best friend for the past four decades as we begin our new journey, returning to her home (and mine) in Colombia.

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