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## *President's Message*

### THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

This year, 2008, marks the 100th anniversary of the collection of vital statistics. Birth and death certificates are used for so many purposes that it is hard to imagine how society functioned without them. They are used for establishing and verifying identity and collecting information for surveillance and research purposes.

At the turn of the last century, the problems confronting public health were much different than the ones we face today. Many people were farmers and often suffered from hookworms and other intestinal parasites. Malaria was common. Waterborne outbreaks were frequent, with diarrhea being a leading cause of death. Tuberculosis was another scourge of the population. I can still remember the sanitarium in Tuscaloosa. We also suffered periodic episodes of polio epidemics.

During the twentieth century many vaccines were developed and immunization campaigns, especially among children, greatly reduced the morbidity and mortality burden of such diseases as measles, mumps, chickenpox, diphtheria and polio. The development of antibiotics further reduced the lethality of many diseases. Sewerage treatment and chlorination of water supplies reduced the incidence of diarrheal diseases.

These advances in public health greatly extended life expectancy and improved the quality of life. As a result, women no longer had to have four or five children so that she could be sure that two or three of them would survive to adulthood. As a result, fertility rates declined, until in many years, women are reproducing at a rate below replacement. The most dramatic improvement has been in infant survival. At the turn of the century, one in ten infants died in the first year of life. Now the infant mortality rate is one-tenth of that.

While we still have infectious and communicable diseases, their contribution to mortality has greatly diminished. We are now confronted with a vastly different mortality regime. Chronic diseases and cancer are the leading killers of the present. Heart disease is the number one cause of death, followed by cancer and stroke. In fact, the leading causes of disease are related to lifestyle. Future ad-

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### **Mark Your Calendars for March 26-27**

A great program and plenty of opportunities to network await you at the Alabama Public Health Association's 53rd Annual Health Education Conference. Room rates are very affordable and parking is free at this convenient location with great shopping areas nearby. Call to reserve a room at the reduced ALPHA rate of \$70 for a standard room, \$80 for a deluxe room or \$110 for a suite. Be sure to reference the Alabama Public Health Association.

Thursday and Friday,  
March 26-27, 2009  
Ashbury Hotel and Suites  
Mobile, Ala.  
800-752-0398



# APHA PRESENTS 2008 AWARDS

The Alabama Public Health Association recently recognized persons from across the state who demonstrated exceptional merit during the past year in the field of public health. The following individuals were presented awards at the association's 52st Annual Meeting and Health Education Conference.

**Dr. John Higginbotham** was presented the Dr. Ira L. Myers Award for Excellence in Public Health. Dr. Higginbotham serves the University of Alabama as Associate Dean for Research and Health Policy, the Director for Rural Health Institute for Clinical and Translational Science, and the Chair, Tenured Professor for the Department of Community and Rural Medicine. He is a member of several national organizations and has over 25 publications to his credit.

A supporter described him as "one of those rare individuals who can achieve results beyond everyone's expectations, and do it with integrity, fairness and diplomacy." Another said he is "truly, one of Alabama's great resources."

This award was established to honor Dr. Myers for his accomplishments by recognizing an individual, group or organization who, through excellence in work, has made a significant impact on some aspect of public health in Alabama.

**Teresa Porter** was presented the Guy M. Tate Award, an award given annually to a public health employee, group or agency with 10 years or less in public health for outstanding current or recent service or contribution to public health. Ms. Porter joined the Alabama Department of Public Health in 2001. Serving in the role of surveillance nurse and as a member of the area emergency preparedness team, she has gone above and beyond the call to monitor health threats of communicable disease and to assist the efforts of the public health preparedness mission. She is described as a worker, a convener, an investigator and a leader. Another described her as a true "public health warrior."

The Frederick S. Wolf Award was presented to **Ava Rozelle**. She began her public health career in Public Health Area VI as social work director and currently serves as Director of Regional and Professional Services for the Bureau of Children's Health Insurance.

Supporters credited her for developing a new social work program and building an outreach model to insure Alabama's children. Called a "visionary," her nurturing style of leadership is appreciated by those with whom she works. One supporter wrote, "I have often heard that the mark of a true leader is one who when they turn around and look behind them they find people following them. Wherever Ava has worked in public health, people have followed."

This award was established in 1982 to recognize an individual who has been active in public health at the local level for more than 10 years; who has demonstrated efficiency, dedication and professionalism in delivery of public health services; and who has provided unselfish community services in areas unrelated to public health.

The Dr. D.G. Gill Award, which is intended to honor an individual who has made an exceptional contribution to public health in Alabama, was presented to **Arrol Sheehan**. This award was the first award established by the association and was so done in 1967 to honor a former State Health Officer, Dr. D.G. Gill. Ms. Sheehan is director of Public Information and has been called a "loyal, dedicated, 'editor supreme.'"

**Shelia Woods** was presented the Virginia Kendrick Award. This award is given annu-



*Dr. John Higginbotham*



*Teresa Porter*



*Shelia Woods*



*Ava Rozelle*



*Arrol Sheehan*



Sarah Hemmings

ally to an individual who has provided notable service to the people of Alabama while serving in a supportive position in the field of public health.

Ms. Woods is office manager with the Walker County Health Department. One nominator who had the pleasure of knowing Ms. Virginia Kendrick said that very similar words could be used to describe them both..."kind and helpful with a realization that support staff are the key to success." Others said she "exhibits a unique combination of efficiency, hard work and an outstandingly positive outlook on solving day-to-day issues and problems."

The Alabama Public Health Association presented **Sarah Hemmings** the Ira L. Myers Scholarship at the University of Alabama at Birmingham where she is pursuing a Master of Public Health degree.



*Chairman David Pettway and his committee have some novel ideas for the 2009 Awards Competition. Be thinking about colleagues you would like to honor in Mobile.*

## TERESA PORTER RECEIVES SHA'S JORDAN AWARD

Teresa Porter, R.N., Surveillance Nurse, Public Health Area 9, Robertsedale, was presented the Southern Health Association's Charles G. Jordan Award at the association's annual meeting in Hot Springs, Ark.

In the seven years Ms. Porter has been with the Alabama Department of Public Health, she has made numerous accomplishments in public health. Her positive approach and winning attitude was particularly important in 2004-2005. Ms. Porter played an important role in overseeing the daily call between the Public Health Area 9 emergency operations center and the hospitals. She was instrumental in working with federal partners to best utilize federal resources in the hospitals and communities. Working closely with the Baldwin County medical community, she organized clinics for out-of-state hurricane providers. She was a pioneer in helping to develop the sound public health emergency response known today in Area 9.

As a member of the emergency preparedness team, Ms. Porter has represented the various roles of nursing in everything from shelter duty to working with local counties to make the communities she serves safer. An example of her above and beyond approach occurred last fall. To address potential threat and need for isolation in a pandemic flu scenario, Area 9 planned and conducted "drive through" flu clinics giving shots to people in their vehicles as opposed to a fixed site in a building. Clinics were held in every area county.

### *President's message continued...*

vances in public health will require that people change the things that they do. For example, smoking contributes significantly to heart disease, cancer, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and premature birth. Diet and exercise are also important. We are experiencing an obesity epidemic that is unprecedented. How do we get people to live healthier? We have medications that can help control hypertension and cholesterol. How do we get people screened? Many cancers are treatable if detected early. How do we provide the screening and early treatment that would reduce the burden of these diseases?

What do I foresee in the future? Our former state epidemiologist Dr. J.P. Lofgren liked to say that we are on the verge of some medical advances that should lengthen life expectancy to 100 or even 120 years. This is possible but unlikely. I do foresee major advances in genetics. We will soon be able to develop replacement organs to use when our old ones wear out. I also see the day, in the not too distant future, when we have universal health coverage. I don't know what form it will take, but it is eventually going to happen. I see a narrowing in health disparities, as more and more of our minority populations become more educated and less impoverished.

It is our responsibility to see that the advances made in public health over the years continue. It is up to us to seek to improve the quality of life of the people of Alabama. It is up to us to identify best practices that advance public health and to advocate for these, so that our population will benefit from the latest scientifically based public health practices.

Please join me in Mobile next March 26 and 27 for the annual ALPHA Public Health Educational Conference to learn more about how we can benefit our fellow men and women and improve both our lives and theirs.

Albert Woolbright, Ph.D.  
2008-2009 President



# A PUBLIC HEALTH OBLIGATION

## *Message from the State Health Officer*

The theme for National Public Health Week in 2008 was “Climate Change: Our Health in the Balance.” Regardless of one’s beliefs about global warming, I think all of us would agree that public health is in a time of change and challenge.

On the national level, presidential candidates are spending their time talking about health care and how to achieve universal access. Public health must be engaged in that discussion. We must ensure that our mission in public health to do things for people that they cannot do individually is recognized and strengthened. We must work to ensure that vaccines are available, that water and food are safe, that the elderly and the young are protected, and that all of the other vital activities which public health performs are accomplished.

Over the past several months, I have become increasingly concerned about growing acceptance of pseudoscience by society. As an example, millions of dollars were spent in litigation about the alleged negative health effects of silicon breast implants. While the women involved were often ill, subsequent studies failed to demonstrate a causal relationship between the implants and the illnesses. A rush to judgment can often lead to an erroneous conclusion with unintended consequences. In like manner, I am very concerned about the growing public aversion to childhood immunizations. This aversion is driven, at least in part, by an unproven belief that vaccines increase the risk of autism.

Without question, the diagnosis of autism has been increasing over the past several years. Whether this represents an actual increase in the disorder or an enhanced recognition of the spectrum of autism is a subject of ongoing discussion.

However, 13 well-controlled trials have been conducted to determine if there is a link between MMR vaccine or thimerosal in vaccines and autism. None of those studies has demonstrated any association between vaccines and autism.

While these studies provide great comfort to us in public health, they do not remove the need for ongoing action on autism. We have a duty to continue to monitor vaccines for safety and adverse outcomes. We must be willing to examine the possibility that vaccines may cause rare disorders in a small number of children. We must ensure that research is being done to identify those small number of children who should not receive a given vaccine.

However, what we must not do is succumb to fear and bad science. The unproven assumption that vaccines may be linked to large numbers of problems in children has real and potentially fatal consequences. As parents have become concerned about vaccines, in many states childhood immunization rates have fallen. As a result, outbreaks of measles are now occurring in unvaccinated children in those states. Measles remains a potentially deadly disease of childhood. Not only does focusing on unproven associations lead parents to avoid vaccine, it also delays research to find the real causes of autism and other childhood illnesses.

In closing, we find ourselves in a time of change in public health. We have a duty to be involved. We must be involved to ensure that health care reform includes public health. We must be vigilant to protect the health and safety of our fellow citizens. We must always base our arguments on good science, but we must never stop gathering facts and evaluating the evidence. Our fellow citizens should expect no less of us.

Donald Williamson, M.D.  
*State Health Officer*

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## BIRMINGHAM CONFERENCE A SUCCESS

Alabama Public Health Association members celebrated National Public Health Week 2008 by attending the 52nd annual meeting and health education conference April 7-8 in Birmingham. President Ricky Elliott welcomed the approximately 260 attendees to the meeting at the Doubletree Hotel.

Vice President Stacey Adams and the Program Committee did an excellent job in attracting great speakers which made for an excellent program. The conference theme was “Prevent, Promote, Protect...Partnering for Health and Preparedness.” Dr. Ed Partridge, director of UAB's Comprehensive Cancer Center, delivered the keynote address and Dr. Sarah H. Parcak was the Aycokk breakfast speaker.

Students at the UAB School of Public Health entered enthusiastically, bearing signs, balloons and bumper stickers in celebration of National Public Health Week, noting the broad scope of public health. The UAB School of Public Health also sponsored a reception at the Lister Hill Library Alabama Museum of Health Sciences.

Legislative Committee Chair Judy Smith was in charge of the silent auction which was fun for the attendees and yielded a substantial amount of money for the treasury from the 52 items donated.

# INAUGURAL ALPHA HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



## **Clyde Barganier, Dr.P.H.**

Throughout his 32-year public health career Dr. Barganier was a member and active supporter of ALPHA. Recognized in the state as well as nationally for his superb leadership in public health as well as rural health care, he made major contributions and is genuinely concerned about and committed to improving access to health services and outcomes for all Alabamians. He was awarded the D.G. Gill Award in 1989.

## **Mary Boyd**

The late Mary Boyd was always a public health advocate and was very proud of being a public health employee. An excellent "recruiter" she never failed to tell new employees about the association and how important it was to be a member. She was the recipient of the Virginia Kendrick Award in 1993 and was also the first person to serve as the association's Executive Director, for which she accepted no pay. Known to many as the "mother of ALPHA" she put her heart and soul into whatever position she held.

## **Michael Cash**

The late Mike Cash was a strong supporter of the Alabama Public Health Association, which he led as president in 1995. A passionate supporter and recruiter for ALPHA, he was a man of character, commitment and dedication. These three qualities shone brightly while he unselfishly volunteered his time for ALPHA and continue to shine today through his legacy.

## **Charlotte Denton**

A spirited and tireless supporter of the Alabama Public Health Association for more than two decades, Charlotte Denton established a statewide public health infection control program, coordinated the state refugee health screening program, and directed the Division of Tuberculosis Control where she was presented with the Public Health Leadership Award. She received the Ira L. Myers Award for Excellence and is a graduate of the South Central Public Health Leadership Institute.

## **Ruth Harrell**

An ALPHA member for more than 30 years, Ruth Harrell has been an advocate for the association not only during her amazing working career but also during her so-called "retired" years. She has an unwavering passion for ALPHA that is evident in everything she does and is a solid rock in ALPHA's foundation. She was awarded the D. G. Gill Award in 1984 and the Ira L. Myers Award for Excellence in 1994.

## **Richard Holmes**

The late James Richard Holmes' professional life was dedicated to public health. An engaged member of ALPHA he served several consecutive terms as treasurer and computerized all of the association's records and processes. He served the citizens of Alabama for more than 30 years in the Jefferson County Department of Health and the Alabama Department of Public Health.

## **Ira L. Myers, M.D.**

The late Dr. Ira Myers was very involved in ALPHA throughout his public health career. He received the D.G. Gill Award. The association's prestigious Ira L. Myers Award for Excellence and the Ira L. Myers Scholarship to the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health were named in his honor.

## **Arrol Sheehan**

A longtime member of the Alabama Public Health Association, Arrol Sheehan has served as newsletter chair for many years and has been called the "voice of ALPHA." She is the 2008 D.G. Gill Award recipient.

## **Anne M. Smith**

The late Anne Mangum Smith began her public health nursing career in 1938 in Randolph County, Ala. Her career lasted more than four decades and included service in seven counties and eventually led to the most esteemed position in public health nursing in Alabama. She was the director of Public Health Nursing in Alabama from 1964 until her retirement in 1984. Always an avid supporter of ALPHA she was the first nurse to be the president of the association and in 1976 she received the D. G. Gill Award. She was inducted into the Alabama Healthcare Hall of Fame in 2000 and the Capstone College of Nursing Hall of Fame in 2001. The 52nd Annual Conference was dedicated to her memory.

## **Ruth Underwood**

Ruth Underwood is the epitome of the public health professional and has been described as a "quiet warrior" who has tremendous influence on her fellow employees, agency leaders, government officials, local citizens and friends. She perpetuates the future of our profession by actively encouraging and molding the "new faces" of public health. She has been the recipient of several ALPHA awards including the Guy M. Tate Award in 1993, the D.G. Gill Award in 1995 and the Ira L. Myers Award in 2006.

## **Marion Wilford**

ALPHA members were treasured people to the late Marion Wilford. Service above and beyond the call of duty was what he was all about during his public health career which spanned three decades and ended with his death in 2005. He was the recipient of the Virginia Kendrick Award in 1990.



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# WHAT IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS IS GOOD FOR PUBLIC HEALTH



Albert Einstein wrote, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Einstein's words should serve as a kind of warning to the next president who faces the daunting challenge of leading efforts to address the shortcomings of our health care system. And, they should be a rallying call for the public health community to bring to the table fresh ideas and strategies that will improve the health and well-being of the nation.

As the presidential campaign rhetoric heats up, we will hear over and over again about the quality and cutting edge technologies of our health care, contrasted with the plight of the uninsured and the abysmal international comparisons of morbidity and mortality. Without question the uninsured suffer in our Byzantine system and our health statistics, both nationally and internationally, are embarrassing. But, will more of what we already have fix these problems?

At the moment we share a collective paralysis of ideas about reform of the health care system. We are mired in hackneyed financial solutions to the system's woes without acknowledging that "all the King's soldiers, and all the King's men, couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again." The seasoned observers of our health care system, especially those in public health, know that increasing funding fails to make the list of the top four or five salient ideas for improving health in the U.S.

The public health community understands the importance of context – social, cultural, environmental and ethnic – to health. A comprehensive health system embraces education, employment and neighborhood, among others as crucial to improving personal and population health trajectories. Have you heard mention of these topics in the current discourse on health care reform?

The business community understands the needs and financial pressures of the average consumer. Wal-Mart's \$4 prescription program, for example, is a well-conceived and implemented health care delivery experiment that changes the way we think about and get our prescriptions.

Rather than rush to buttress an ailing system with more money, the public health and business communities should begin a serious dialogue about focused reforms, beginning with primary care which includes prevention and prescriptions. No doubt there are some novel ideas out there that are independent of understanding complex funding schemes and could have significant health promoting yields.

What is good for business is good for public health. Imagine that!

Max Michael, M.D.  
Dean  
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## **In Memoriam, Mark Lee**

It is with regret that we announce that former ALPHA Board Member Mark Lee, 45, died July 13 in Harvest. Mark had served actively in the organization for several years.

# FORMER STATE HEALTH OFFICER DR. IRA L. MYERS

A great supporter of the Alabama Public Health Association, former State Health Officer Dr. Ira L. Myers, died July 23 in Montgomery. Throughout his public health career he remained very involved as a leader and supporter of ALPHA.

During his era in public health, countless advances were made in the treatment of disease, and he initiated the mass Salk polio vaccine program as a part of his early work. He was instrumental in the initiation of a narcotics enforcement program, newborn screening, computerization, and support of a laboratory system. During his tenure there were declines in infant and maternal mortality, and facility expansions through the Hill-Burton Act. He founded the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Alabama.

State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson noted, "Dr. Myers was a giant in public health. Many of the programs begun by Dr. Myers remain essential today."

Dr. Myers served in leadership positions with many professional organizations and received appointments to many national advisory committees. The Alabama Public Health Association established the Ira L. Myers Scholarship to the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health and created the Ira L. Myers Award for Excellence in his honor. On the occasion of his retirement in April 1986 then U.S. Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop and Dr. Albert B. Sabin, developer of the oral polio vaccine, were honored guests at the retirement celebration the association held.

During his long career of public service, Dr. Myers received many honors and awards, a few of which include the following: the Delta Omega Award for scholastic excellence, Harvard School of Public Health; William Henry Sanders Award and the Physicians Recognition Award of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama; D.G. Gill Award of the Alabama Public Health Association; Alabama Public Health Association Hall of Fame; Alabama Academy of Honor, Senior Citizens Hall of Fame, and Arthur C. McCormack Award of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

Dr. Myers was highly involved as a Baptist layman and was a deacon, trustee and Sunday School teacher at Dalraida Baptist Church. He also served on the Alabama Baptist State Convention Executive Board, as chairman of the Retirement Center Board, on the Disaster Relief Committee and on the Judson College Board of Advisors. Dr. Myers endowed the Martha and Dorothy Myers Fund for Faculty Development at Judson College in memory of his wife, Dorothy, and his daughter, Dr. Martha Myers, Baptist missionary who was martyred in late 2002 in Yemen.

Survivors include his wife, Woodie Myers; son, Grady Myers; son, Stephen Myers; daughter, Joanna Kingery (Mark); seven grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.



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