This special issue of the Journal commemorates the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. Current EIS Officers and recent alumni were invited to submit manuscripts representing the diversity of work in which they have participated. After internal review at CDC, 27 manuscripts were submitted and were subjected to the American Journal of Epidemiology’s usual, rigorous peer review process. This issue begins with three invited commentaries, including a historical perspective by the CDC Director; an overview of past, present, and future EIS activities; and a description of over two dozen applied epidemiology training programs based on the EIS model that have been developed in other countries.

The 12 original contributions in this issue exemplify the wide range of topics investigated and the epidemiologic methods used by EIS Officers. Among these papers are examples of both domestic and international studies, integration of advanced laboratory techniques with epidemiologic methods, and extensive field work ("shoe-leather epidemiology") to gather urgently needed information. Many show how epidemiologic analyses can have a direct and timely impact on public health practice. Two papers illustrate the use of surveillance for drug-resistant pathogens (Perz et al.) and adverse vaccine events (Verstraeten et al.). Examples of outbreak investigations, long a major component of EIS activities, are reported by Anderson et al. and Brooks et al. Case-control methods are used to examine the potential relation of a chronic disease to an environmental exposure (Balluz et al.) and to examine risk factors for death in work-related aircraft crashes (Bensyl et al.). Reynolds et al. and Myers et al. analyzed data from existing cohorts to identify risk factors for selected reproductive outcomes, while Ayala et al. identified racial disparities by analyzing national vital statistics records. Epidemiologic methods were also used to evaluate public health programs related to a vaccination schedule (Hutchins et al.) and an injury prevention law (Kanny et al.). Finally, Sansom et al. used prevention effectiveness techniques to assess parental acceptance of vaccine-associated risks.

Publication of this special issue of the Journal helps celebrate the public health contributions of the approximately 2,500 professionals who have completed this 2-year applied epidemiology training program. Further information about the EIS program may be obtained at the EIS Website (http://www.cdc.gov/epo/dapht/eis/).

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