Editorial: Remarks From the Dean on the Centennial of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

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This issue of the American Journal of Epidemiology celebrates the centennial of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the world’s oldest independent graduate school of public health. The School’s origins lie at the very beginning of academic public health, and it has witnessed many changes since its founding. There has been an exponential increase in the numbers of schools, public health degree programs outside of schools, and students seeking public health training. This growth has been driven by the recognition of the power of public health to solve big problems and, by doing so, improve the health of populations everywhere, from Baltimore to Bangladesh.

William Henry Welch, our founding dean, envisioned an institute of hygiene that would use the power of research to maintain health and prevent disease. He also recognized the importance of studying and intervening upon populations to protect their health, in addition to the usual clinical interaction of 1 physician and 1 patient. Welch was a beloved mentor, internationalist, and reformer who held every important leadership position in American biomedical science. I still point to the Welch-Rose report, published in 1915, for a description of public health that has stood the test of time. In that report, public health is defined as being “. . . found rather in the end to be accomplished—the preservation and improvement of health—than in the means essential to this end” (1, p. 5). Although Welch could not have anticipated all of the tools that we now use, he did foresee that we would incorporate new technologies and disciplines as needed to meet the future challenges to health. This willingness to adopt and adapt new methods has proven essential over the past century as new threats have emerged, from the first glimmers of the devastation caused by tobacco, to the global toll of chronic diseases like cancer and diabetes, to infectious diseases like human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, Ebola, and now Zika. In addition to developing new methods and new approaches to solving problems, academic public health generates new knowledge and evidence that underlies rational policy and, perhaps most importantly, trains future leaders to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Academic public health has never been more vibrant or impactful; even William Henry Welch could not have predicted the extent to which his vision has been executed. The School, which was founded as the School of Hygiene and Public Health and renamed in 2001 in honor of public health hero and benefactor Mayor Michael Bloomberg, today has more than 600 faculty and 2,000 students, as well as funded programs in over 100 countries. We now influence the world through tools unimagined in 1916, including internet-based learning, Massive Online Open Courses (more than 5 million learners), Twitter (more than 400,000 followers), and Facebook (more than 30,000 page likes), among many others. However, all of what we do, whether carried out at our School or elsewhere around the world, has 1 purpose, a purpose best summarized in our School’s vision statement: “Protecting health, saving lives—millions at a time!”

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REFERENCE

1. Welch WH, Rose W. Institute of Hygiene, presented to the General Education Board, May 27, 1915. RF, RG 1.1, Series 200L, Box 183, Folder 2208, Rockefeller Archive Center.