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The Importance of Being a Consequential Public Health Journal

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The Importance of Being a Consequential Public Health Journal

Since January 2016, *AJPH* associate editor Roger Vaughan and dean of the Boston University School of Public Health Sandro Galea have diligently published every month a review of the *Journal's* contents from the perspective of a “Public Health of Consequence.” Over four years they have scanned the 594 research articles we published and discussed 138 of them. Roughly one fourth. Hats off!

These monthly editorials helped us monitor whether the plan to orient the journal to support practice and policy was working. In the January 2016 issue in which the first Public Health of Consequence piece appeared, I wrote: “Authors, *AJPH* aims to publish ideas, information, and results that are translatable into practice and policy.” Indeed, over the past four years, the journal has published groundbreaking research about, to mention only a few, the Flint, Michigan, water crisis, the impact of the Affordable Care Act, the epidemic of Zika and microcephalia, and the epidemic of despair among White Americans. The *Journal* has led the revival of gun violence prevention research and reported on the impact of policies such as the Berkeley, California, soda excise tax on soda consumption and California Proposition 47 on drug possession.

We reported on the potential impact of a minimum wage of \$15 for fast food and for health care workers and on the impending loss of massive numbers of members of the governmental public health workforce. We reported estimates of the prevalence of transgender persons in the United States and provided a collection of articles explaining why inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons in national surveys was justified and valid. We provided public health perspectives of the anniversaries of, again to cite only a few, the Black Panther Party (1966–2016), the Nurses' Health Study (1976–2016), the Russian Revolution (1917–2017), the Great Influenza (1918–2018), Stonewall and the text “Our Bodies Ourselves” (1969–2019), and the unfortunate graft of slavery in North America (1619–2019). Several articles helped quantify the impact of structural racism on public health indicators. And, importantly, since 2017, every September 11, *AJPH* and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have published a supplement reviewing the state of the science to support public health preparedness and response to disasters.

However, our publications would be inconsequential if those in the public health field did not

unite to turn the evidence into practice. The *Journal* has promoted a public health dialogue between public health practitioners of opposing political views and between faith-based coalitions and secular public health institutions. We have begun this year a continuing medical education (CME) program based on *AJPH* articles that associate editors, authors, and the American Public Health Association prepare together to reward those who use these publications as training. Enrollments in the CME are taking off.

Our publications would also be inconsequential if nobody saw them and read them. Some statistics depict the reach of the journal. In June 2019, *AJPH* articles were cited 40 000 times in 2018, up from 35 000 times in 2015, making it one of the most cited scientific journals. *AJPH* article online readings or downloads increased regularly from 1.14 million in fiscal year (FY) 2015 to 3.55 million in FY2018. One *AJPH* article, “Weaponized Health Communication: Twitter Bots and Russian Trolls Amplify the Vaccine Debate” by Broniatowski et al. (bit.ly/2G6AdBf), is currently the 37th most discussed article ever, out of the almost 12 million articles tracked by Altmetrics. It is also the fifth most discussed article of 274 000 published scientific articles in October 2018. *AJPH* podcasts have been listened to 46 000 times on specific apps, and already more than 25 000 times in 2019. The audience for our accompanying podcast in Chinese has substantially increased to about 700 listenings per month. We have no count of the probably many more people who listen to the mp3 directly from the *AJPH* Web site.

These few examples, among many more, illustrate how, over the past four years, the *Journal* has striven to support public health actors by publishing historical or recent empirical evidence relevant to public health policy and intervention and the thinking that goes with it. There is always more to do, and we welcome the challenge. We will put the monthly editorials on a “Public Health of Consequence” to rest and await a new formula. But the spirit goes on as illustrated by the set of papers on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) assembled by Professor Marion Nestle in this issue. **AJPH**

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45 Years Ago

Medicating the Food Stamp Program

The food stamp program could be converted into an improved nutrition program if Congress were willing to structure it as a medical program and to minimize it as an incomes program. . . . If the program were to be medicated, that is, no food stamps were awarded unless the recipient had first visited a physician, the program could be made more effective in reaching its nutritional objectives. Why leave food stamp nutrition up to a social worker who must decide on the basis of a financial statement as to whether the individual or family is eligible and undernourished? . . . Why not have an attending Medicaid physician decide whether a person should be made eligible for specified foods through food stamps?

From *AJPH*, May 1974, p. 479

47 Years Ago

Nutrition for Children

Over the past decade the relation of nutritional factors and opportunities has become a subject of sharply mounting interest for research and application. The reason for this development is not hard to find. As under-privileged groups in the population of the United States and other countries aspire and act to improve their conditions, it is clear that among the components that interact with disadvantage and poverty, nutrition, especially in infancy and childhood, occupies a position of central importance. This was emphasized in the Final Report of the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health (1969).

From *AJPH*, April 1972, p. 462