Foreword

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What better way to tackle the number one cause of preventable death in this country—and the number one public health issue—than by educating, engaging, and inspiring the nation's future leaders of public health? The American Legacy Foundation (Legacy) and the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH) asked this question six years ago, not long after Legacy was created as a result of the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement reached between the tobacco industry and attorneys general from 46 states and five U.S. territories. The result has been a dynamic and fruitful partnership between Legacy and ASPH entitled the Scholarship, Training, and Education Program for Tobacco Use Prevention (STEP UP) project.¹

Since 2001, STEP UP has aimed a bright spotlight on tobacco, drawing the attention of students, faculty, and administrators in schools of public health around the country. This issue of *Public Health Reports* is the culminating product of the initiative and highlights the accomplishments of STEP UP. Many of the authors represented in this issue have benefited from STEP UP grants, conferences, and other resources. STEP UP's primary components include the ASPH Tobacco Use Prevention Council, the ASPH tobacco studies survey of schools of public health, STEP UP grants (many of which are highlighted in this special issue), and two national tobacco studies workshops.

ASPH TOBACCO USE PREVENTION COUNCIL

One of the first accomplishments of STEP UP was the establishment of the ASPH Tobacco Use Prevention Council in 2001. The council convenes annually at the ASPH meeting and advises the deans of member schools on tobacco issues related to curricula, course development, and research. Participation is open to all ASPH members with interest or expertise in tobacco use prevention and control, and currently all 37 schools of public health are represented on this council.

TOBACCO STUDIES SURVEY

As a part of STEP UP, ASPH conducted a tobacco studies survey among its member schools. The survey collected baseline information on tobacco-related education and training, tobacco-related grants and con-

tracts, and degrees and certificates offered in tobacco-related studies. This was the first survey conducted by ASPH regarding curricula and concomitant funding in a specialty area. The survey, conducted in Fall 2002, revealed a relative lack of emphasis on tobacco as a core curricular topic area. Just over half (53%) of the 33 respondents reported that their schools offered elective tobacco-related courses for credit and a total of 98 students had either enrolled in a specific tobacco class, graduated with a tobacco concentration, or defended their doctoral dissertation in a tobacco-related area over the previous academic year (2001–2002).

STEP UP GRANTS

The STEP UP grants program showcases some of the partnership's most significant accomplishments. Through a competitive process, STEP UP awarded 22 grants to 11 ASPH-member schools. The partnership funded projects in four categories: curricular innovation grants, pre-doctoral scholarships, doctoral dissertation scholarships, and small grants/pilot studies. These projects are described in more detail in the commentary by guest editors Halperin and Lando and in articles in this issue.

NATIONAL ACADEMIC TOBACCO STUDIES WORKSHOPS

As a part of STEP UP, ASPH organized two national academic tobacco studies workshops. These meetings brought together graduate public health students, faculty, practitioners, and administrators from the 37 ASPH member schools for the first time to discuss approaches to integrating tobacco control education, research, and core competencies into schools of public health. The workshops, held in April 2004² and January 2006, drew more than 180 attendees in total and highlighted the work of all 22 STEP UP grantees, as well as participants from other academic institutions, tobacco control organizations, and government agencies. (The outcomes of a STEP UP strategic planning meeting, held concurrently with the National Conference on Tobacco OR Health in Chicago, May 2005, are summarized in this issue in the "From the Schools of Public Health" section.)

Legacy is proud to have partnered with ASPH on STEP UP, and the Foundation would like to thank those who have contributed their time and expertise to

making the program a success. Dr. Harrison Spencer, President and CEO of ASPH, and his staff members, Elizabeth Weist, Director, Public Health Preparedness, and Kalpana Ramiah, Manager, Educational Programs, have led STEP UP with great skill and dedication. Legacy would also like to thank the three deans who served as successive chairpersons of the ASPH Tobacco Use Prevention Council: Dean James Merchant (University of Iowa College of Public Health), Dean Andrew Balas (Saint Louis University School of Public Health), and the current chairperson, Dean James Raczynski (University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Dr. Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health). Finally, the Foundation is grateful for the significant contributions of the ASPH/Legacy Review Committee, which developed the STEP UP grant guidelines and reviewed all grant applications. A list of review committee members is provided in the Figure.

Figure. ASPH/Legacy Review Committee members (since 2001)

Dean James M. Raczynski, PhD University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Dr. Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health
Dr. Cheryl Heaton, DrPH American Legacy Foundation
Dean Andrew Balas, MD, PhD Saint Louis University School of Public Health
Dr. Elizabeth Barbeau, MPH, ScD Harvard University School of Public Health
Dr. Michael Begay, MA, PhD University of Massachusetts School of Public Health and Health Services
Dr. Barbara Berman, PhD University of California at Los Angeles School of Public Health
Dr. Vicki Cleaver, EdD University of Oklahoma College of Public Health
Dr. Sue Curry, PhD University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health
Dr. Karen Emmons, PhD Harvard University School of Public Health
Dr. Melbourne Hovell, PhD San Diego State University Graduate School of Public Health
Dr. Harry Lando, PhD University of Minnesota School of Public Health
Dean Jim Merchant, MD, DrPH University of Iowa College of Public Health
Dr. Kathleen Miner, PhD, MPH, MEd, CHES Emory University Rollins School of Public Health
Dr. Patricia Mullen, DrPH, MPH, MLS University of Texas School of Public Health
Dr. Mary Ellen Wewers, MPH, PhD, MPH Ohio State University School of Public Health

MOVING FORWARD

Legacy's mission, to create a world where young people reject tobacco and anyone can quit, cannot be truly realized without the full integration of tobacco as a major public health challenge into training programs for health professionals. The Foundation's support of STEP UP represents one such effort directed toward accredited graduate schools of public health. Although progress has been made, much work remains to be done. Schools of public health collectively graduate a growing proportion of the public health workforce in the U.S. as a result of the trend toward requiring the MPH for various positions in public health, health education, and administration, in conjunction with the retirement of many in the workforce who acquired their public health training mainly in the field rather than in the public health classroom. Increasing numbers of public health schools are recognizing the importance of applied public health training within the more traditional course-driven curriculum, and thus front-line experience in a range of public health issues is becoming more commonplace. Tobacco control should be no exception, particularly in view of the fact that a strong body of scientific evidence has been established for a number of population-based tobacco reduction strategies. Whether it is the implementation of policies known to support behavior change, such as increased cigarette prices and clean indoor air laws, or the dissemination of key clinical interventions, like evidence-based cessation services for preventing and reducing consequences of smoking, the public health imperatives are clear. Tobacco control advocates have implemented a number of successful community action strategies. These include halting the production of the new "Uptown" brand of cigarettes targeting African Americans during Dr. Louis Sullivan's tenure as head of the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as the highly visible public education earned-media strategy of Dr. Calvin Butts of the Abyssinian Baptist Church to "white wash" the tobacco billboards that formerly littered the Harlem skyline.

Despite all the progress resulting from public health interventions to ameliorate the impact of tobacco both domestically and abroad, there are still many unanswered research questions and it is essential that the nation's schools of public health take a lead role in this endeavor. Tobacco remains the single largest cause of preventable death by a large margin in the U.S. and other developed countries, and if the World Health Organization's prediction proves correct, by 2030 this will be true worldwide. Huge health benefits would occur if we simply applied the same consumer protection provisions that are in place for almost all

other products. Even simple, incremental steps, like modestly increasing excise taxes, have the potential to save literally millions of lives.

Six years ago, it was rare to find a school of public health course devoted to tobacco or even to see a substantial tobacco segment within a more general course. Dissertations on the topic of tobacco were few and very far between, and internship or fellowship opportunities for MPH students were virtually non-existent. Now there is a growing range of offerings for students at all levels who seek to learn about and acquire the tools needed to confront the challenges ahead. In its wisdom, the public health academic community recently agreed to create a National Board of Public Health Examiners to develop certification criteria for the core public health curriculum. Among the topics covered, the inclusion of testing on basic understanding of the scope of the tobacco epidemic, its consequences, and known strategies for its amelioration, clearly should be prominent. Only when the larger public health community places an emphasis on public health problems commensurate with their relative impact can we achieve a workforce whose skills and knowledge base are properly aligned with our greatest health challenges as a nation and as a global community.

The many innovative activities underway at schools of public health, whether supported through start-up funds from Legacy or other sources (i.e., the National Cancer Institute, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and others), represent a wide range of critically important efforts. Without these initiatives and those that will hopefully follow, it is unlikely that the nation's schools of public health will be graduating health professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to address

the worldwide tobacco epidemic. Over 10,000 people lose their lives each day to tobacco and this number is growing. This makes the tobacco epidemic a crucial priority for public health. Unlike many natural disasters and other epidemics, this one is due in large part to deliberate marketing and promotion by an industry acting as the disease vector. With an annual international marketing budget in the tens of billions of dollars (the most recent figure for the U.S. alone was over \$15 billion in 2003,³ greater than the entire GNP of many countries), the tobacco companies have the potential to overwhelm public health efforts. This must not be allowed to happen. In a world where so many health risks demand our attention, we must devote far more energy and resources to the new leading cause of preventable death worldwide. This challenge cries out for the concerted attention of creative minds from all schools of public health as we work toward a smoke-free world.

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REFERENCES

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