Special Section: Reflections on the Contributions of Harold S. Luft as Health Services Researcher, Mentor, and Editor

Reflections in Honor of the Contributions of Harold S. Luft: Overview of the Occasion

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On September 19, 2008, a special “Festschrift celebration” was held to mark Harold S. (Hal) Luft’s transition from leading the University of California San Francisco’s (UCSF) Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies (from 1993 to 2008) to his new position as the Director of the Palo Alto Medical Foundation Research Institute (2008 to present). Affirming Hal’s myriad accomplishments over 30 years at UCSF, the Festschrift provided an opportunity to highlight different aspects of Hal’s remarkable career as researcher, teacher/mentor, and journal editor—setting exceptionally high bars in each role.

While Hal will continue to thrive in his new leadership position, this transition provided all of us a fitting and lovely opportunity to express our deeply felt admiration for a stellar and exceptional economist/researcher as well as our Institute’s Second Director. Along with formal presentations, the event brought together family, friends, and many professional colleagues to share in stories and toasts.

The following three papers by Rashi Fein, Catherine McLaughlin, and Drummond Rennie (as well as remarks by Adams Dudley, Deborah Garnick,

and Ruth Malone not presented here) were at the heart of the celebration. Each speaker represented a different aspect of Hal's professional life, and each played a significant role (or roles) as a valued colleague, mentor, or mentee. Each was asked to share his/her perspective, inspired by working with Hal, of what every health services researcher should aspire to contribute as members of the health services research community.

With that larger goal in mind, these three essays remind us that there are many important roles we should all strive to achieve as well as recognize and embrace in our colleagues, so that our field can advance. Here we recognize three crucial areas of excellence—all key to advancing our field—as exemplified by the accomplishments of Hal Luft and several of the many colleagues he has worked with throughout his distinguished career: excellence in health services and health policy research, in mentoring trainees and junior colleagues, and in peer review as a colleague and as an editorial leader in the field.

Health services/health policy researcher. We are indebted to Rashi Fein for guiding Hal to the then nearly untrodden path of health economics and the even less traveled world of health services/health policy research, as well as for his strong recommendation of Hal for the position at the Health Policy Program at UCSF (now the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies). Of course, Hal would have been a star anywhere, but what a boon for UCSF, given our focus on translating research into policy. As Rashi notes, Hal has always been mindful of the real-world applications of his research, "... he knows economic theory, yet has not lost sense of the importance of return to the real world; he understands the need to translate his findings for the non-economist and the importance of inferring policy implications" He does this by being generous in sharing his knowledge and expertise. Thus, we have all benefited from the broad application of Hal's work—from the wide dissemination and application of his research findings through publications, presentations, and consultations to policy makers at the international, federal, state, and local level; from his participation and leadership roles with organizations such as AHRQ and AcademyHealth; and from his visionary leadership of the Institute for more than 14 years.

Teacher/mentor. Hal has been exemplary in this role, illustrating three key attributes needed to attract and nurture a strong future cadre of health services researchers, that is, being: *inspiring*—stimulating and challenging mentees to

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expand their thinking and be creative; *dedicated*—an active participant in our fellowship seminars, which he never missed unless he was ill (rarely) or out of town; *generous*—with his knowledge and expertise, and in authorship. As Catherine notes, “He fully embraces the realization that when articles stop referencing your work as the standard and instead reference the work of a former student, fellow, or junior faculty, that’s a sign of successful mentoring.”

Editor: Hal approached his editorship roles (as senior associate editor and then as co-editor-in-chief at *Health Services Research*) as he did his research, teaching, and director responsibilities: examining the data, thinking creatively about solutions, and daring to try new approaches. He also demonstrated the same personal qualities in this role: professionalism, integrity, and balance. After reviewing processes at other journals, Hal together with Ann Flood streamlined and improved the journal’s peer review processes by implementing a web-based review process using Manuscript Central. Hal’s other goals were to make the Journal more policy-relevant and its processes more transparent and accountable. After working as a Board Member of Academy-Health on issues related to funders’ influences on research, consulting with Drummond Rennie about industry and other influences on health services research, and talking to editors of sister journals, Hal was particularly proud that HSR adopted a strong, but reasonable, policy for disclosure of potential bias in conducting and reporting results.

As Hal continues in the next phase of his career, we wanted to applaud and thank him for his contributions . . . thus far, and we hope these essays illustrate how we can all make a difference in building the field of health services research in multiple areas.