From the Editor-in-Chief

Opposite the Editorial Page: Introducing a New Feature in *The Milbank Quarterly*

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WITH THIS ISSUE OF *The Milbank Quarterly*, WE introduce a new section that we hope will stimulate conversation and add value to the complicated nexus of health care, population health, and public health policy. This is a section called Op-Ed, featuring eight of the best minds currently working to improve the public's health: bioethicist Ronald Bayer, health policy journalist Jonathan Cohn, *JAMA* Editor-in-Chief Emerita and pediatrician Catherine DeAngelis, public and global health law scholar Lawrence Gostin, children's health policy and legal expert Sara Rosenbaum, historian of public health and the environment David Rosner, Maryland's Secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene Joshua Sharfstein, and health economist Gail Wilensky.

Although they will cover different topics, each of *The Milbank Quarterly's* contributing writers brings two things to our op-ed pages: an expertise that is strictly defined as a combination of population health research excellence and credentials as a health policymaker or policy adviser and the ability to write in an engaging and thought-provoking fashion.

When uttering the term "op-ed," we might immediately think of the famed op-ed section of *The New York Times*, which has often been referred to as the most valuable piece of real estate in American journalism. Yet even this vitally important page, one that graces the breakfast tables, computer screens, and electronic devices of a wide swath of informed and inquisitive readers, is a relatively new wrinkle in the storied history of the "Gray Lady." The op-ed section's first appearance was in the September 21, 1970, issue.¹ That morning, the editors clearly stated their mission, and it is one worth taking to heart as we launch our own op-ed section: "We hope that a contribution may be made toward stimulating new thought and provoking new discussion on our public problems."²

While the moniker “op-ed” has rightfully been interpreted by the reading public to mean a parade of opinion pieces, it actually has a more mundane journalistic origin. When broadside sheets of newsprint were the principal means of newspaper publishing, this page appeared directly next to the editorial page. Hence, editors referred to it as “the page opposite the editorial,” or “op-ed,” a term that has been all but lost in our era of digitization, news aggregation, blogs, and electronic versions of what used to appear only in old-fashioned ink and on paper.

Nevertheless, *The New York Times* cannot take sole credit for the modern-day concept of an op-ed page. Most historians of American journalism acknowledge Herbert Bayard Swope, the legendary editor of Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*, for creating in 1921 this vehicle of informed commentary. Formerly a “catchall for book reviews, society boilerplate, and obituaries. . . . [Swope] devised a method of cleaning off the page opposite the editorial, which became the most important in America.”³ Calling it the *World’s Page Op*, Swope employed a stellar list of in-house columnists such as Theodore Lippmann, Heywood Broun, and Franklin P. Adams to present their views on the arts, culture, politics, and events of the day in a style that was both entertaining and edifying but very different from the tone of reporting in the rest of the paper.^{4,5}

Other newspapers, such as the *Chicago Tribune* (in 1912), the *Washington Post* (during the 1930s), and the *Los Angeles Times* (during the 1950s), experimented with their own commentary sections as well. Perhaps most famous was the *New York Herald Tribune*, which for a long time published short essays by outside contributors on its editorial page.⁶

The New York Times’ op-ed section, however, had a more tortuous birth. The midwife, editorial page editor John J. Oakes, began pitching the idea in the early 1960s. This brainstorm was unenthusiastically received by the young publisher Arthur Ochs (“Punch”) Sulzberger after he was suddenly promoted to the post after the premature death of his brother-in-law, Orville Dreyfoos, the publisher of *The New York Times* from 1961 to 1963. Throughout the 1960s, a persistent Oakes tried pilot versions of a commentary/opinion section by extending invitations to prominent public intellectuals to write an occasional column called “Topics of the Times.” But it was not until after the *Herald Tribune’s* demise in 1966 that the *Times* assistant managing editor Harrison Salisbury revisited the idea of an op-ed page with publisher Sulzberger. It took another four years, and the backing of many other

The New York World Building, Park Row, New York City. 1905. The Illustrated Post Card Company, New York.

Times' luminaries, before the now familiar and influential page made its debut. But unlike the old *World's* Page Op, the *Times'* op-ed page has always featured both columnists who work for the paper and guest commentaries from those who have never stepped foot in the newsroom.⁷

The Milbank Quarterly is, of course, a scholarly, peer-reviewed publication, making it markedly different from any of the daily newspapers just described. Although our contributing writers obviously will have opinions to present, these will always be nonpartisan and based on evidence they have uncovered in their scholarship and experience accrued in their work as policymakers.

Many population health, health policy, and medical journals include a commentary section, but few, if any, consistently feature a regular panel of writers. Rather than the over-the-transom or invited commentaries that these other journals typically feature, *The Milbank Quarterly* will hew more closely to Herbert Bayard Swope's 1921 vision, but with a 21st-century sensibility: informed readers seek to build a lasting relationship with engaging and reliably sound columnists. The goal is that our contributing writers will attract an audience that looks forward to each installment of their nuanced and informed ideas about health policy. But the guiding beacon of each essay will be the discussion and dissection of new, workable, and exciting evidence-based ideas, rather than ideology.

The June 2014 issue of *The Milbank Quarterly* also offers five superb articles for your consideration and summer reading.

Our lead article, by Rachel Barry, Heikki Hiilamo, and Stanton Glantz, documents the intertwined history of American tobacco companies and marijuana legalization and its subsequent marketing. Making adept use of the UCSF Legacy Tobacco Documents Library collection, this article reveals Big Tobacco's long-standing interest in getting into the "pot business" since the 1970s. As states like Colorado and Washington legalize the recreational use of marijuana, the authors make a compelling case for policymakers to adopt regulatory frameworks similar to existing tobacco laws in order to prevent youth from becoming users and to control market domination by companies seeking to maximize profits from the sales of another addictive substance. The governor of Colorado, John W. Hickenlooper, provides an "on the ground" commentary on the realities of these new policy dilemmas.

We next turn to the public health regulation of an entirely legal substance of abuse: alcohol. Srinivasa Vittal Katikireddi, Lyndal Bond, and Shona Hilton offer a qualitative policy case study of the minimum

unit pricing for alcohol legislation recently passed in Scotland to stem the tide of alcohol-related illness. Describing the competing ways in which policy stakeholders argued for MUP legislation, the authors stress the importance of framing such alcohol policies as a broad public health issue that affects all segments of the population. They determined that this successful strategy—one that has already received great acclaim in Scotland and in the international press—is worth considering by those advocating changes in public health policies in many areas around the globe. Accompanying this article is a commentary on the evolving thought on alcohol abuse and the public's health by Peter Donnelly, Scotland's former deputy chief medical officer.

Heidi Allen, Bill Wright, Kristin Harding, and Lauren Broffman explore the sociodemographic characteristics associated with stigma and their potential impact on access to health care, quality of care, and patient well-being among the poor. The authors found that stigma did not pose an access barrier in the traditional sense and that there were no notable differences in the likelihood of using care or the mean number of visits. They did discover, however, that stigma or the fear of stigmatization among the impoverished was related to higher rates of unmet needs, perceptions of poorer quality of care, and less well-being across several measures.

Antoine Boivin, Pascale Lehoux, Jako Burgers, and Richard Grol investigate the key ingredients for effective public involvement in improving health care and making policy decisions. Their randomized trial process evaluation identifies several specific components of involvement interventions that foster public representatives' legitimacy, credibility, and power to influence health care improvement and policy decisions.

Finally, in a cogent review, Joseph Newhouse and Thomas McGuire ask a critically important question: How successful is the Medicare Advantage (MA) program in the United States? Their article evaluates MA's recent performance and payment options for improving its performance in the future. The authors found Medicare policies regarding lock-in provisions and risk adjustment, which were adopted in the mid-2000s, have mitigated the adverse selection problem previously plaguing MA and that, on average, MA plans appear to offer higher value than traditional Medicare does.

We trust that you will enjoy this latest issue of *The Milbank Quarterly*. More important, we hope that every commentary and article offered on the following pages will stimulate a dialogue that benefits our collective

health. But we are humble enough to understand that even though the *Quarterly* can act as a catalyst for such dialogues, the real discussion takes place among our community of readers. Let the conversation begin!

References

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