

Birth of an Electronic Journal – the *Florida Public Health Review*

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It is with great pride, satisfaction, and high expectations that the *Florida Public Health Review* is born. Whereas the *FPHR* is a joint initiative of the University of South Florida College of Public Health and the Florida Public Health Association, I think I speak for both organizations when I say that we hope the *FPHR* becomes a resource and a tool that is embraced by the entire public health workforce and academic communities of Florida.

To a certain extent, the *FPHR* replaces the now defunct *Florida Journal of Public Health*, a publication given a rebirth in 1987 through the energy and foresight of the late Robert D. May, M.D., the *FJPH*'s first Editor-in-Chief and the former Director of what was then known as the Pasco County Public Health Unit. Having arrived at the University of South Florida only a year earlier in 1986, by way of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, I was impressed that Florida had its own public health journal, a fact that I believe would still make it unique among states.

Originally anticipated to be a quarterly publication, the *FJPH* struggled along, hindered somewhat by Dr. May's untimely passing in 1988. Dr. Jack W. Frankel carried on the tradition as Editor from 1988 to 1992, overseeing its publication as a semi-annual entity before turning the reigns over to Clara H. Lawhead, who labored for more than a decade to give it life. Our thanks go out to these zealous and high achieving individuals. Anyone who collected or preserved copies of the *FJPH* through the years also will remember the many beautiful and distinctively *Florida* covers that adorned the *FJPH*. The homepage of the new *Florida Public Health Review* attempts to maintain this image of Florida. Through the years, the *FJPH* had many friends and supporters, both private and public that offered financial assistance to keep things afloat. Sometimes, these "friends and supporters" were identified, but just as often, they remained anonymous. Ultimately, be it from a dearth of timely and salient articles, a multitude of competing priorities, the lack of dedicated time to oversee publication, or the spiraling costs of printing and mailing, the *FJPH* has become part of the archives of public health in Florida.

To succeed, to survive, and to serve – that is the mantra of our new initiative. We must learn from the



past, and hopefully, we have done some of the necessary homework that will lead us in the right direction.

First, we have to have an entity that is useful to both the public health workforce community and the academic

community. Such duality of purpose is possible, if somewhat challenging. The *FPHR* seeks the scholarly contributions of Florida's academic community, but disseminating *only* the esoteric side of public health ultimately will not serve Floridians. Thus, the *FPHR* needs input from every nook and cranny of the public health community to guarantee its success. I expect that the *FPHR* will uphold high standards of peer-review and publication excellence. The *FPHR* seeks to find the common ground between researcher and practitioner, and encourages all types of contributions.

Second, being produced and delivered in an electronic format, the *FPHR* will seek to employ the most current technologies to foster communication in public health. Although electronic publishing requires some special personnel talent to prepare manuscripts for posting on the Web, traditional printing and mailing costs are eliminated. Readers can, if desired, print those articles of greatest interest. The electronic age offers further benefits that help to avoid the pitfalls of previous communication endeavors. Whereas this initial posting of the *FPHR* has several contributed and solicited manuscripts, similar to print journals, future postings will occur as often and as rapidly as new manuscripts can be submitted, reviewed, revised, and formatted – on a one-by-one basis. Therefore, program notes, research studies, new and responsive initiatives, important communiqués, and other relevant informational pieces can be published while they are still timely and useful. There is no need to await the successful approval of six or eight or ten manuscripts before dissemination, a shortcoming of print media. Further, thoughtful letters, correspondence, and reactions to published articles can be posted almost

instantaneously, thus generating immediate and ongoing dialogue and debate. Plans call for a continuous volume through the calendar year, and at year's end, the volume will be archived but maintained electronically for future reference.

Third, quite unlike print journals, manuscripts are not limited in length or level of detail, except by whatever practical terms are dictated by authors and readers. Moreover, postings are not limited to the printed word and standard article format. Therefore, postings may include video and sound clips, multimedia presentations, slides and other video presentations, scanned brochures, posters, and photos, and linkages to other Web sites that enhance learning and relevance to practice. Thus, even articles that convey complex information or report uncommon statistical procedures easily can direct readers to Internet venues where information can assist interpretation and provide new insights.

Fourth, we have assembled a group of practitioners and academicians, diverse in background, experience, geographic location, and work settings, to comprise the Founding Board of Editors. It will provide guidance and advice at every measure, but particularly in the early going as we strive both to lead and to respond to Florida's public health challenges and workforce development issues. It will be the Board's role to provide this quality assurance. In the immediate future, we will be expanding the Board. In addition, we will need both reviewers and contributors. *Please consider this brief editorial to be a call for participation in any or all of these activities.*

Fifth, it is the intention of the *FPHR* to offer a special opportunity for students, not only those at the University of South Florida College of Public Health, but also others in public health and health professions education programs at all Florida institutions that embrace this new initiative. I have long admired and respected the example and tradition of the *Harvard Law Review*, a publication run and managed for the most part by second and third year law students who earn their privileged status as a result of their first year's academic performance. In the process they learn both the law and its dissemination to the legal community. I have asked myself repeatedly why this model cannot be emulated in the world of public health. Are not written communication, dissemination of thought, and review of the ideas of others appropriate, if somewhat ambitious ways for students of public health to sift through matters that allow discovery of the best, the richest, the most effective, and the most fruitful practices, and separate them from ones that are inferior? At USF we will recruit two or three excellent public health students, and enlist them in carrying out the work of the

FPHR, through graduate assistantships or the granting of academic credit. We hope that other students will be inspired to volunteer time and effort. We invite our colleagues at other institutions to recruit their students in a like fashion, and with the help of our colleagues, we vow to try to engage all of these students in dialogue, through the Florida Public Health Association as well as through other mechanisms. We also trust that public health students are of such a caliber and a creativity that they will find their own ways of seeking out one another. Of the validity of this belief I have little doubt. What will these students do? In addition to facilitating review and editorial efforts, I hope they will be interviewers, correspondents, and authors. There is much to be gleaned from the public health practitioner community and these lessons would be enormously beneficial to academicians, practitioners, and students alike to read (or see a video of), a detailed interview with a health department director, epidemiologist, or other official who has just had to oversee an emergency immunization initiative, address an outbreak of an infectious disease, manage a biological or chemical agent scare, or deploy a workforce to respond to a natural disaster such as a tornado or hurricane. I do not know just yet how all of this will work, but I am prepared to dedicate effort to its achievement and to inspire others toward this same end.

Finally, if most of these stated ambitions do indeed come to fruition, we shall reserve the option of publishing one print version of the *FPHR* per year, possibly featuring the best articles of the year as designated by the Board of Editors. Maybe this print version might be organized in conjunction with the Florida Public Health Association's annual meeting. Anyway, it is an idea, and perhaps, one that extends a hand out to the traditionalists in the crowd.

In conclusion, the *Florida Public Health Review* is an experiment – not merely for USF or the Florida Public Health Association – but for all of Florida's public health community. As Dr. May said about the *Florida Journal of Public Health* in its first issue, "...this is ultimately, your journal." The same can be said of the *FPHR*, but in addition, it is you and all of us who will give the *FPHR* its credibility, its respect, and its prestige. We hope that this first posting will be well received, and that we will be able to look back upon the *FPHR* in the years to come and say: "It succeeded. It survived. And it served."