A Message from the Editor

This issue marks the passing of another year and the last of Volume 119. In so many ways it was a great year for the Journal—I have received many messages of congratulations to our staff and authors on some outstanding articles, destined to influence public health well into the future. Particularly gratifying are the messages I received from educators indicating that many of the papers appearing in *PHR* are in use in the classroom. As far as I am concerned, that is the highest compliment.

It has also been a rough year for the Journal. There have been too many bumps in the road related to changing publishers. It should have gone so much smoother, but even now problems remain. The criticisms have been reasonable. All that is left to say is that it is my aim to find a satisfactory answer to each and every one. The most common complaint, and my biggest frustration, concerns the time it takes for a manuscript to appear in print after it has been accepted. Although I don't have any indication that *PHR* is doing worse than any other major Journal, the delay is unacceptable. I can concentrate on eliminating days and sometimes weeks from the processing time of any particular manuscript, but I have not found an acceptable way to fit more manuscripts into our publisher's allotment of 600 pages per year. Every solution explored so far requires unacceptable compromise. If we change the font size, a few pages per issue are conserved, but it becomes less readable. If we rigidly limit article size, we change the tenor of some articles. If we go to 8 or 12 issues per year, we increase the subscription price proportionately. These just do not seem like good solutions.

In 2005 we will try a few new things. We are planning an on-line-only section to an issue. It will be voluntary and will not influence the determination of the acceptability of a manuscript. The Table of Contents in the printed version will include the on-line articles, but it will indicate that the on-line articles are accessed only at www.publichealthreports.org. It will not affect indexing in PubMed, Index Medicus, or any other indexing service. If it is important to an author that a manuscript is printed quickly, perhaps because of the public health importance or for career considerations, then they might prefer the electronic version. If it is popular with our authors and readers, we will expand on it. This is expected to take months off the waiting time.

Getting back to present, this final issue of 2004 is rich with solid public health topics. The feature article is "Breastfeeding and the Risk of Childhood Leukemia: A Meta-analysis." Marilyn Kwan and her colleagues collected all extant case-control studies and conducted a meta-analysis to address this perennial public health issue. From an epidemiologic point of view, it is a fine example of how aggregating studies can result in uncovering relationships that are not necessarily apparent in the individual studies. From a public health point of view, it is yet another strong argument for encouraging breastfeeding over formula whenever possible. Other articles in this issue explore domestic violence, validation of quality of life scales, food insecurity, and smallpox vaccination programs. One article, by Mark Blaxill, reviews the question of temporal trends in the frequency of autism. It is from a different vantage point than most other articles on the subject, including ones we have run in the Journal, but he puts forth a well-reasoned position. It is also a good reminder why many of us picked public health as our career choice.

Robert A. Rinsky, PhD