A Message from the Editor

As I write this column, I have one of the most amazing documents of modern times in front of me. An indescribably huge triumph of Public Health. Almost incomprehensible. It is the March 21, 2005, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (*MMWR*) announcing the elimination in the United States of rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS)—"a constellation of birth defects that often includes blindness, deafness, and congenital heart defects." The endemic state of rubella is now officially over. As reported in this *MMWR* article, from 1962 to 1965 (a mere three-year period of a pandemic rubella, occurring just a few years before the rubella vaccine licensure in 1969), there were 12.5 million cases of rubella in the United States alone, resulting in 2,000 cases of encephalitis, 11,250 fetal deaths, 2,100 neonatal deaths, and 20,0000 infants born with CRS. Being the age that I am, I knew some of these numbers as people. I stare at the Figure that has to be displayed in log scale to show the rapidly declining curve from tens of thousands cases per year to fewer than 20 cases in 2004. I actually shiver, and my eyes begin to tear. This is as triumphant an event as an end to a war. It is as wondrous as a Mars landing. It is cause for prideful celebration.

There was some discussion about it on NPR. Also, it was mentioned on the network news that I happened to watch that evening (I assume it appeared on the other channels as well). There was somewhat better coverage in the print media. But it received only a fraction of the ink and air-time devoted to the coverage of the most recent celebrity court case, and even less relative to the day's anticipated college basketball scores during this "March Madness." I rationalize that this taking-for-grantedness is another good sign of how much better the public health community has made life—improvements are now so routine that they can be taken for granted. I hope that it is not a sign of how illiterate we as a nation have become about public health, but I know better. To the thousands of public health folks who contributed to this victory over the last half a century, you have my admiration and respect for this accomplishment, and my heartfelt thanks.

To continue the tradition of these fine people, this issue of *PHR* reports on the work and campaigns of other public health researchers, practitioners, and historians. Some of the topics presented in this issue are newly recognized, and some have been with us for as long as we have been addressing rubella, but victory is still a ways off. In this issue, we are also presenting a collection of lead articles that were originally scheduled to be presented in a special issue, then became part of an experiment for the *Journal* in electronic-only publishing, and finally appear as a special section in this issue. As you can see, we are still trying new things—at times successfully, and when not we are learning from our mistakes. Sometimes it seems like there is a lot of learning going on.

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