A Message from the Editor

One measure of civilization is if every child begins with a fair shot at an optimally healthy life. How to provide such favorable conditions for all is the challenge. We do pretty well as a society when a kid falls down a well. Police and fire departments, hospitals, and heavy equipment operators readily commit their resources to extricate the child. The ER examines and repairs all the physical injuries that can be identified and treated, the Red Cross and the Ronald McDonald House attend to the family's needs for food and shelter at a distant specialty hospital, and financial institutions set up accounts to pay for the child's unusual expenses. It is really something to behold.

But what happens when a child stumbles into a well of mental illness? It's every bit as dark, cold, lonely, and impossible to climb out of unassisted as the literal well. Unfortunately, it is a well in which huge numbers of children are deeply and tightly wedged. Where is our civilized response? In this issue, we include a special report highlighting the subject of Children's Mental Health. This collection of articles, guest edited by Karen Hacker and Karen Darcy, is a start in showing us the way toward helping this vulnerable population.

Other topics covered in this issue range from the use of death certificates in examining ethnic-specific mortality to the role of literacy in mediating the relationship between education and health outcomes. We also feature an article on a new "public health detailing" program in New York City. This program borrows an approach from the pharmaceutical industry to improve the delivery of clinical preventive services to primary care providers.

And we are happy to introduce a new column in this issue of PHR. *International Observer* will be edited by Dr. Mark Robson, University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey School of Public Health. Dr. Robson is also Visiting Professor of Environmental Management at the Prince of Songkla University in Hat Yai, Songkhla, Thailand, and Visiting Professor of Environmental Risk Assessment at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. You may remember Mark from his photo essay in the September/October 2005 issue of PHR. Mark was in Thailand on December 26, 2004, when the tsunami hit. He and his student, Rapin Yangwanitcha, dispatched to devastated areas to help with the emergent conditions and provided consultation for the longer-term effort of restoring public health infrastructure. Their photo essay brought home to us the human toll, and reminded us that health security is largely an illusion.

Much can be learned by paying attention to public health efforts outside the U.S. For this first *International Observer* column, Mark chose a paper by Arch G. Mainous III et al., which unveils the shortcomings of treating an ethnic minority group as if it were homogeneous when planning health care and prevention strategies. The authors' conclusions about planning for health interventions targeted at immigrants to the UK apply to similar scenarios in the U.S. and other countries.

If you have a manuscript covering an international public health issue that you believe is underappreciated by the primarily U.S. public health community that makes up our readership, you can reach Mark through the regular PHR channels. Do us a favor and identify manuscripts intended for the *International Observer* column as such.

Robert A. Rinsky, PhD