A Message from the Editor

For those of us in public health, prevention has always been the foundation of our work. It is rewarding that recently so much attention has been paid to national efforts related to prevention. In late 2010, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) unveiled a new strategy to end tobacco use in our country by releasing a comprehensive action plan, "Ending the Tobacco Epidemic: A Tobacco Control Strategic Action Plan."[1] This plan was followed by publication of the 30th Surgeon General's report on tobacco, "How Tobacco Smoke Causes Disease: The Biology and Behavioral Basis for Smoking-Attributable Disease."[2] *Healthy People 2020* (*HP 2020*),[3] the nation's 10-year objectives for promoting health and preventing disease, was also disseminated. And, as happens every five years, HHS and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are expected to jointly issue this year new Dietary Guidelines for Americans,[4] which will focus on good nutrition, health promotion, and disease prevention.

Since the landmark "Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health" in 1964,[5] the health consequences of smoking have been reported on more than any other single public health topic. Over the years, the message has taken on new perspectives, such as the 1990 report that focused on the health benefits of smoking cessation[6] and, in the first decade of the 21st century, the dangers of secondhand smoke.[7] Informing the public about this leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. has helped dramatically reduce tobacco use. Unfortunately, this decline has recently leveled off.

Together, the Tobacco Control Strategic Action Plan and the Surgeon General's report will continue the fight against tobacco-related mortality and morbidity. As Surgeon General Regina Benjamin noted when announcing the report, "Exposure to tobacco smoke—even occasional smoking or secondhand smoke—causes immediate damage to your body that can lead to serious illness or death." For public health professionals, understanding the health consequences of tobacco use and being able to assist individuals and communities to stop tobacco use are top priorities. Learn more about the Surgeon General's report by reading the *Surgeon General's Perspectives* (see p. 158–9) and about the HHS Tobacco Control Strategic Action Plan by reading the commentary by the Food and Drug Administration's Dr. Lawrence R. Deyton (p. 167–9).

Tobacco cessation is one of many public health issues that needs to be addressed, as evidenced by the new *HP 2020* objectives. These objectives are the public health roadmap for our country for the next 10 years.

When many of us were growing up, the four basic food groups were touted as the way to achieve a healthy diet. Just as nutrition science has evolved, so have recommendations for a healthy diet. The seventh edition of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans remains unchanged from previous editions; however, the latest version also recommends consuming a diet comprising mostly plant-based foods, and emphasizes the importance of acquiring nutrients through food sources rather than through dietary supplements and heavily fortified food products. Because diet-related conditions constitute the majority of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in this country, it is important not only to know the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, but also to be role models in implementing them.

And, finally, *Public Health Reports* continues its coverage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and how its implementation will affect Americans. In this issue, we examine the topic from two different perspectives: how health-care reform will affect disparities in minority populations, and implications for tax-exempt hospitals.

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