

Benefitting everyone

by Jesse Tapp, Director 1991



Jesse Tapp, MD, MPH
Photo courtesy Chris Bennion

Creation of the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP) was proposed in an application to the Health Resources and Services Administration. NWCPHP would be based in the Department of Health Services in the School of Public Health at the University of Washington as a resource for the whole School.

NWCPHP was funded and a tiny office was opened in the E-Wing. With the dean's blessing, all departments of the School were informed of NWCPHP's existence and mission. Only scant funding was available to assist in outreach; nevertheless an opening was being enlarged for a genuine exchange with the world of practice.

An advisory committee representing several states in the region, both local and state health departments, and others was formed to provide guidance. It was clear early that there was a need for practitioners to learn the basic disciplines, such as epidemiology and health service administration. This led to the first Summer Institute for Public Health Practice (page 4). Members of the departments of Environmental Health and Epidemiology were key players in all these efforts. And important activities were proposed to work with the School of Nursing on behalf of public health nurses, the backbone of local public health.

From the beginning, we always intended that students have opportunity for well structured and supervised experience in their chosen fields of study. The goal was to enhance relationships between

faculty and students and public health workers and agencies in the region. Placements were to be developed for students in the School's preventive medicine residency to meet national standards for hands-on public health practice experience. Faculty members provided academic supervision while public health practitioners provided invaluable access to problem solving in their communities.

Medical center lawyers crafted appropriate contracts with county governments for placement of students and faculty in health department activities. It was not a matter of simple handshakes. The value of this integration was obvious. Some practitioners who provided access to their worlds and expertise were offered clinical faculty appointment in recognition of their voluntary teaching.

Growth and development of NWCPHP was slow in its infancy for the usual academic reasons: lack of sufficient seed money, lack of recognition of outreach as a factor in faculty promotion and tenure decisions, and very long distances to be traveled in the Pacific Northwest.

It is gratifying to see NWCPHP survive these obstacles to the age of 20, becoming a respected arm of the School of Public Health. There are so many who have made it work; all deserve our gratitude.

Northwest Public Health Training Center

NWCPHP is one of 14 nationally recognized Public Health Training Centers (PHTC). The federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funds these regional training centers to strengthen the technical, scientific, managerial, and leadership skills of the public health workforce.

Our mission as the Northwest PHTC is to ensure the basic competencies of all public health personnel in our region and to promote the development of public health leaders in the Pacific Northwest. Our activities range from frontline training to formal higher education, focusing on the priorities and strengths of our partners. NWCPHP serves six states in the Northwestern United States: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. We also have tribal partners in this geographical area. The area we cover makes up almost one-third of the land mass of the United States and extends across three time zones.

NWCPHP staff also revised the PHTC network repository of over 250 online training courses developed by all of the PHTCs. The searchable database is stored on the Association of Schools of Public Health website to be constantly available to practitioners.



HRSA Representative John Kress stands with Susan Allan, Jack Thompson, and Mark Oberle in October 2009 recognizing John's long term as NWCPHP's PHTC project officer.