

# Connecting academia & practice

by Dean Patricia Wahl

When I became Dean of the UW School of Public Health in 1999, I brought to the job little knowledge of public health as it is practiced in the real world. I recruited Mark Oberle as our School's Associate Dean for Public Health Practice—the first such appointment in the country. Mark had served from 1987 to 1990 as our School's liaison to the public health agencies in this state and was the first director of our Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP).

To gain a better understanding of public health at the community level, I decided to visit a few local health departments in our state and asked Mark to select some “representative” ones. He claimed there was no such thing and insisted we visit all of them. Accordingly, we made the commitment to visit all 34 local health jurisdictions in the state of Washington. It took almost two years, but we did it and learned a lot.

While we found that our School's expertise was widely recognized and respected, and our academic programs and research were highly valued, they appeared to be neither accessible nor of benefit to local public health. It was clear that we needed a “gateway” into our “ivory tower” that would provide access to public health practitioners; thus, NWCPHP now works with state and local health agencies throughout the Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, Idaho, (WWAMI) and Oregon region. While we noted that there was a critical need to provide public health training outside of the University environment, we did not initially have the resources. We subsequently sought and received federal funding to extend the educational resources and expertise of NWCPHP throughout our state and region, and we have continued to expand NWCPHP's ability to link our School and the practice community.

NWCPHP has played an important role in implementing our School's strategic vision of collaboration and partnership—bringing new tools to practice and valuable experience to our students and faculty—and we look forward to its continuing to serve our region in the years ahead.



*Patricia W. Wahl*

Patricia W. Wahl, Dean  
UW School of Public Health

## Thank You

Dean Omenn & Dean Wahl



Since NWCPHP's inception in 1990, the University of Washington's School of Public Health has only had two deans. Dean Gil Omenn (pictured at left) was Dean when

NWCPHP began. Dean Pat Wahl (pictured above) has been at the helm since 1999.

As we look back at our 20 year history, we appreciate their leadership. They clearly saw the need for engaging academic resources and practice. It's because of this commitment that NWCPHP can offer tools and resources to promote excellence in public health practice.



Above, Gil Omenn, Thomas Koepsell, and Patricia Wahl. At right, welcome cake for Dean Wahl.

All photos on this page courtesy the Dean's office, UW School of Public Health.

### Common Acronyms:

- CDC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- HRSA: Health Resources and Services Administration
- NWCPHP: Northwest Center for Public Health Practice
- SPH: School of Public Health
- UW: University of Washington

