

Archives

Steven P. Geiermann, DDS

Appointment

CAPT James A. Lipton, DDS, PhD, is now serving as full-time senior advisor to Dr. Dushanka Kleinman, chief dental officer of the US Public Health Service, in direct response to the increased changes associated with DHHS Secretary Tommy Thompson's transformation of the Commissioned Corps announced last July. Dr. Lipton earned his DDS from Columbia University School of Dental and Oral Surgery and a PhD in sociomedical sciences from the Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. He served on the faculties at Columbia University School of Dental and Oral Surgery and New York University College of Dentistry before being commissioned in the PHS, where he worked in the Health Resources and Services Administration and the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, NIH. Dr. Lipton has experience within both the regional and central offices of the Public Health Service and has chaired its Dental Professional Advisory Committee. He is a fellow of the American College of Dentists, held positions in many professional and scientific organizations, and authored or coauthored over 70 clinical and research publications and abstracts.

Obituaries

RADM Lireka P. Joseph, MPH, DrPH, chief professional officer for the Scientist Category of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, daughter of Louis (deceased) and Martha Joseph, died February 17, 2004. She concurrently served as the director of the Office of Health and Industry Programs within the Center for Devices and Radiological Health at the Food and Drug Administration addressing critical communication, education, and policy interpretation for stakeholders nationally and internationally. As the chief professional officer, RADM Joseph oversaw the USPHS scientist officers and provided advice to the Surgeon General. Among her many honors, RADM Joseph re-



Lireka P. Joseph

ceived a Distinguished Service Medal, a Meritorious Service Medal, two Outstanding Service Medals, a PHS Citation, two Outstanding Unit Citations, and 10 Unit Commendations. Prior to her 21 years in the Public Health Service, she taught and administered programs in dental epidemiology for dental and dental hygiene students. She received her BS, MPH, and DrPH degrees from the University of Michigan. RADM Lireka P. Joseph is survived by her mother, Martha A. Joseph; brother, Andrew R. Joseph; sister-in-law, Lynda Terova Joseph; nephews, Louis T. Joseph and Andrew W. Joseph; and her dear friends, the Kleinman family. Memorial contributions may be made in her name to the American Cancer Society, PO Box 43025, 8219 Town Center Drive, Baltimore, MD 21236-0025.

CAPT (retired) E. Walter Wolford, DDS, MPH, died peacefully at home on February 6, 2004. He graduated from the University of Iowa College of Dentistry in 1965 with a DDS degree and was a member of the National Dental Honorary Society Omicron Kappa Upsilon. After graduation, Dr. Wolford entered the Public Health Service instead of private practice, because "95% of dentists provide care for 33% of the population; I chose to serve

the other 67%."

He entered the Indian Health Service (IHS) in 1966 after serving a PHS internship. His first assignment was working in a mobile dental trailer in Sisseton, South Dakota. His exceptional organizational abilities and self-motivation soon became apparent to his commanding officers. They questioned how anyone could accomplish so much with such limited resources and be so efficient without diminishing quality. This spawned his intense interest in studying and developing effective quality assurance measures and efficient methods for providing dental care throughout his career with the IHS. In his second assignment at Lapwai, Idaho (1968-70), Dr. Wolford's interest in public health and natural talent for management enabled him to reorganize the dental supply purchasing system, as well as revising the training of dental auxiliaries in four-handed dentistry.

Dr. Wolford transferred to the USPHS Division of Dentistry in 1970 to complete formal public health training. After receiving his MPH from Johns Hopkins University in 1973, he joined the staff of the Division of Dental Health, National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD. This was a period of intense activity in dental public health with the War on Poverty in full swing and a cascade of new federal health professional legislation



E. Walter Wolford

recently enacted. He quickly became familiar with the use of databases and chart audits for quality assurance purposes. His seminal work in the field became standard procedure for reviewing dental programs within the nation's federal Neighborhood Health Centers. His approach was so successful that soon other components of the Neighborhood Health Centers' review replicated his concept. While he only stayed with the Division of Dental Health for a short time, the work that he started and the experience gained would serve him well. In 1974, Dr. Wolford returned to the Indian Health Service as chief dental officer for the Santa Fe, NM, service area and began to create a dental quality assurance program that would later serve as a model for the IHS.

In 1976, Dr. Wolford was appointed the first director of quality assurance standards for the IHS national program at Headquarters West, Albuquerque, NM, and expanded his impact on dental quality assurance across 27 states. Working initially to modernize the criteria for Dental Program Effectiveness and Efficiency Standards, he saw that virtually all the IHS information systems would soon need to adapt to the changing political environment of tribal self-determination. In a visionary way, Dr. Wolford redesigned the centralized IHS Dental Data Reporting System to work effectively with a distributed computer network technology, anticipating that most dental programs would assume full control of their operations and that third party billing would soon become a funding reality under tribal auspices. His goal was to create a practical clinical information system, which was a byproduct of day-to-day operations, rather than simply a bureaucratic data reporting system of little value to clinicians, as it had been for many years.

Experience in pursuing this goal enabled him to assume a larger role in the redesign and integration of all IHS information systems. In 1984, as the first dentist to hold the position of associate director of information resources management in the Indian Health Service, he spearheaded the development of the computerized Resources and Patient Management System (RPMS) for all IHS and tribal programs, which served as a model for other federal agencies.

During 1976-84, Dr. Wolford

worked with the American Dental Association and several dental schools to design an innovative Quality of Dental Care Evaluation system that included expanded duty auxiliary operations and patient management decisions based on public health principles. Years later, Walt expanded quality evaluation to include components for community dentistry and administrative management of local dental programs, which was far ahead of its time in public health dentistry, and has since been modeled by numerous state dental programs.

As part of the IHS information systems redesign and modernization effort for dental programs, Dr. Wolford developed a new method to periodically assess the oral health of Native Americans. In partnership with Dr. Frank Martin, he created a patient-based oral health survey instrument based on the "Basic Pathfinder" methods promoted by the World Health Organization. This enabled local programs to conduct ad hoc surveys in an acceptable manner to meet their needs and for IHS Headquarters to conduct uniform surveys among a large sample of clinics for monitoring general trends in oral health and treatment needs for resource allocation purposes.

Dr. Wolford constantly exhibited integrity, integrity, honesty, and sincerity throughout his career. His tireless efforts to achieve the greater good dominated his personal and professional life. He rapidly rose through the ranks, received numerous decorations for his outstanding work, and retired from the Public Health Service with the rank of captain. Yet his service to dental public health had only just begun. Over the next 10 years, he kept active as dental director for the state of New Mexico's Department of Corrections, as dental director for the state of New Mexico, as assistant professor at the University of New Mexico, School of Medicine, and as a provider for a nonprofit school-based program.

In 1999, Dr. Wolford led the effort for changing New Mexico's dental practice act to allow for the collaborative practice of dental hygiene. He envisioned an expanded role for this practitioner that allowed for increased access to preventive services for young and old alike in nontraditional settings. He pressed for privatization of the state-run sealant program using

these practitioners. His goal was always to increase care and access by all available means. To make privatization possible, he pressed for and was successful in securing the first increase in Medicaid fees in over a decade. He argued that raising these fees high enough would encourage private industry to accept Medicaid as a viable revenue source. In doing so, access was indeed increased and private corporations did develop to take care of underserved and poor children.

In 1998, he approached the University of New Mexico School of Medicine to begin a separate division that would focus on dental services and dentist education. The seed money approach was used often during his tenure as state dental director to begin and expand programs throughout the state. The Division of Dental Services began in 1999 and soon expanded to provide services to the indigent, developmentally disabled, and medically compromised. In 2002, Dr. Wolford retired as state dental director and came to the university as an assistant professor. During his short stay, he successfully completed an application for an advanced education in general dentistry residency. The first class of five residents will be admitted during the summer of 2004. Plans are underway to endow the residency professorship in his honor.

During his last year, Dr. Wolford began to rethink his purpose. His wife suffered a serious illness, from which she thankfully recovered. He decided that he needed the flexibility to be with his family. Walter would never retire; he began working for a nonprofit school-based program offering that flexibility. In a small town four hours from Albuquerque in January 2004, he was back in the clinic taking care of children.

Dr. Walter Wolford is survived by his wife of 45 years, Marjorie; his children Mikael, Pamela Mount, Jeffrey, and Erik; his brother, James Wolford; his sisters Ardis Schwark, Fran Terhune, and Marilyn Allensworth; and his grandchildren Jessica Wolford and Sean Mount. Donations may be made in his name to the American Cancer Society.

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