

Archives

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Obituary

Ruth Roemer, 89, a pioneer in public health law who led efforts to regulate tobacco use and expand women's reproductive rights, died August 1, 2005 in Los Angeles. Called a modern icon of public health by colleagues, Ms. Roemer was a longtime University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) professor whose unique background as a lawyer in a field dominated by physicians made her an influential advocate.

A 1939 graduate of Cornell Law School, Ms. Roemer worked as a labor lawyer during the 1940s. She shifted to health law in the 1960s after participating in a landmark study of the laws governing admission to mental hospitals in New York State. Soon after joining the UCLA School of Public Health in 1962, she helped organize the California Committee on Therapeutic Abortion, which spearheaded abortion law changes in the state. She was prominent in campaigns to add fluoride to public water supplies across the country. She also inspired advocates pursuing a wide range of public health agendas, including eliminating obesity and fighting discrimination against people with AIDS.

In 1993, she teamed with Allyn Taylor of the University of Maryland's law school to produce a document that outlined what became the world's first public health treaty — the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Its goal was to reduce the adverse economic and health impacts of the tobacco industry through legislation and guidelines controlling advertising, smuggling and taxation, and it was signed by 168 countries and ratified in 2003.

Achievement

In late 2004, Dr. Robert Bagramian was the guest of honor helping Changhua Christian Hospital in Taiwan, a major medical and dental facility, celebrate the 40th anniversary



Dr. Robert Bagramian recently returned to Taiwan to help celebrate the 40th anniversary of a dental clinic he helped establish in a hospital on the island.



The three individuals in the picture taken 40 years ago (left) are the same individuals who appear in the picture on the right taken recently. Dr. Robert Bagramian (A) trained both individuals. Dr. Samuel Chuang (B), a dental resident in the 1960s, was director of the dental program at Changhua Christian Hospital. Philip Wang (C), also a dental assistant in the 1960s, is now a successful businessman.

of the dental clinic he founded. Dr. Bagramian was the first Western-trained dentist to provide oral health care on the island during the 1960s. During the three years he was in Taiwan, Bagramian played a major role in helping the hospital establish a two-chair dental clinic. He worked with newly trained dentists and dental assistants, trained hundreds of others, taught at a local dental school, and also helped in outreach efforts to provide oral health care in both urban and remote parts of the island.

Much has changed since Dr. Bagramian left in 1965. The small dental clinic now has 55 chairs. The dentists he originally trained are now approaching retirement, but one established a dental department within another major Taiwanese

hospital. The small bungalow where he once lived still stands. Instead of looking out its windows onto rice paddies, the view is now of high-rise apartments and offices.

Reflecting upon his visit, Dr. Bagramian was struck by what has...and has not...occurred in Taiwan. "Residents of the island have all the trappings of modernization and a much higher standard of living, but more needs to be done in dealing with issues that affect the quality of life." In lectures he delivered during his visit, Bagramian noted that he "had not seen a lot of progress during the last four decades" in addressing oral health care issues. One reason cited for the lack of progress was the discontinuation of water fluoridation. "When the fluoridation equipment broke down, it wasn't repaired or

replaced." Another problem is the affinity many Taiwanese have to a native plant, beetle nut, a product that produces a bright red juice that stains teeth and is suspected of being carcinogenic.

"While treating oral health care problems is commendable, more attention needs to be focused on preventing those problems. That effort seems to be lacking," Dr. Bagramian noted.

Dr. Robert Bagramian, DrPH, MPH, DDS is a diplomate of the American Board of Dental Public Health and a Professor of Dentistry at the University of Michigan Schools of Dentistry and Public Health.

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