That’s a tall order and even more challenging than it sounds. First, there has to be a vision, and then one has to transform reality.

The first time I met Dennis Gillings, CEO of Quintiles Transnational Corp, it was obvious that he was a master at transforming vision into reality. Don Helzworth, former Constella CEO, has that ability. So do Leah Devlin (State Health Director and Director of the N.C. Division of Public Health), Carmen Hoekser Oden (Former Secretary of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services and now Milbank Memorial Fund President) and Bill Atkinson (CEO Wake Med). And they’re not alone.

Leadership is a critical ingredient to improve health in the 21st century. Problems facing us are vast—huge disparities in the health of people across the U.S. and around the world, rising threats of infectious and chronic diseases, rising costs and plummeting resources, challenges of allocating new technologies so they benefit as many people as possible, and assuring that all people in the U.S. have access to health care. In today’s world, we need strong leadership more than ever before.

While in the past, public health leaders may have focused primarily on the poor and disenfranchised, now we recognize that to achieve measurable improvements in community health, broader partnerships across sectors are needed—with religious organizations, businesses and a variety of non-government organizations. Public health must be broader, deeper and more inclusive.

Strong leaders have clear ethical codes that guide them. They are willing to take tough stands on difficult issues. Dr. Dan Okun (Environmental Sciences and Engineering professor and former chair), Dr. Lucy Morgan (Health Behavior and Health Education professor and former chair) and UNC President Emeritus Bill Friday were exemplars in this regard, forever enlightening Chapel Hill through their personal and professional stands against segregation. I am proud of Carolina’s tradition in this regard.

It also is critical that leaders remember that we are not our jobs and offices. My father interacted with a lot of celebrities in his job at the American Cancer Society, but he never got carried away with a sense of his own importance. I like the adapt that our friends are the ones we had before we were directors, presidents and deans. And our dogs love us no matter what! Leadership benefits from perspective.

Across our School, there are hundreds of examples of leadership—people who lead programs and departments, who see needs and act on them, who mobilize people, run organizations, and improve health.

I point to three examples of leadership—demonstrated by students. Carolina for Kibera, an organization devoted to improving the lives of people living in one of the world’s worst slums, was started by Carolina students, including Kim Chapman, one of our own master’s of public health alumni. Carolina for Kibera is a remarkable organization that has received worldwide recognition. This year, the Minority Student Caucus hosted the 29th Annual Minority Health Conference, with more than 620 people attending. Janelle Brown and Eboni Taylor led the effort with incredible maturity. (Visit www.minority.unc.edu and see page 48.)

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Leadership is a fundamental part of improving the public’s health. It is our imperative. I am so impressed by the leaders this School has helped develop. Please read about some of them in the pages that follow. Together, let us transform the vision of a healthier world into reality.

Dr. Barbara K. Rimer

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SCHOOL NEWS

Dr. Barbara K. Rimer
Dean

Carolina Public Health

From the Dean’s desk

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