



DR. BARBARA K. RIMER

## I wrote this flying over the Cascade Mountains, going home from the annual Association of Schools of Public Health Deans' Retreat

in Vancouver, B.C. The mountains are grand, majestic, awe-inspiring in scope and size—a natural metaphor for the challenges facing public health. Our 40 (and growing) accredited schools of public health share a grand mission to improve the public's health across the U.S. and around the world through our teaching, research and service. Our task's scope is huge and complex—to understand infectious and chronic diseases and halt the spread of these diseases, reverse the obesity epidemic, develop and apply effective prevention strategies, assure access to health care, eliminate health disparities, deliver safe water to all the world's people, improve our global environment and more. These are huge mountains, but so is our determination!

We in public health are optimists. Armed with knowledge, effective interventions and powerful partnerships, we can—we will—make the world better, safer and healthier.

Several public health deans were interviewed for this issue. I thank them for their wisdom, insight and collegiality, and encourage you to read their perspectives about the future. As deans, we are committed to improving the public's health.

Changing the world requires huge resources. National Institutes of Health funding has fallen precipitously, and it is becoming more and more difficult to be funded. North Carolina's state budget supports about 18 percent of our School's costs—primarily faculty salaries. These sources are insufficient to meet all our needs.

I am so grateful to Dennis and Joan Gillings for their unprecedented and generous gift, one that permits us to soar in search of scalable solutions to public health problems. Their generosity is grounded in their personal connections to our School—he, a former biostatistics professor, and she, a former staff member in the department. They understand the size and scope of public health challenges. And as transnational citizens, they know that most health problems transcend national borders. They, as we, are immersed in and committed to North Carolina. Yet, as Dr. Leah Devlin, our N.C. State Health Director, has said: we all are global citizens. It is no contradiction to be both local and global citizens.

The most significant application of the Gillingses' gift is funding Gillings Innovation Laboratories (GILs) to solve problems in North Carolina and around the world. I am so excited about the potential of these projects to accelerate solutions to public health problems. (Read more about these projects and their leaders on page 26 or visit [www.sph.unc.edu/cph/weblinks](http://www.sph.unc.edu/cph/weblinks).)

Their work includes:

- new vaccines for children, using models that could change vaccine production;
- portable tools to monitor air pollution;
- models and methods to address the rapidly rising number of mental health problems in North Carolina;
- advanced statistical science in clinical research to quickly move it forward into clinical and statistical practice;
- state-of-the-art laboratories, methodologies and biomarkers to detect adverse effects of chronic exposure to arsenic; and
- public health impact of moving toward a local, sustainable food system.

These projects don't end with discovery. We will use our new knowledge to improve the public's health while training our students to be the next generation of public health leaders and problem-solvers. Every project will have specific outcomes for which teams are accountable. It is not enough to dream; we also must deliver.

While we aim to move mountains, our feet are planted firmly on the ground where so much work must be done—in North Carolina and around the world.

As our School adds their name to ours, we celebrate the Gillingses' generosity and the wonderful people they are. In this issue, we also celebrate and honor the many donors who have enabled the School to fund scholarships, professorships, rooms, research and so much more. The higher we climb, the farther we can see, and the more we can do.

*Barbara K. Rimer*