

Book Review

Ready to Go: The History and Contributions of U.S. Public Health Advisors. Beth Meyerson, Fred Martich, and Gerald Naehr, ASHA; 2008; *hardcover*, \$28.95

Public health is in the news on a daily basis, whether for responding to an environmental disaster or for preparing for a potential epidemic such as H1N1. One way to illustrate the richness of public health history is through the stories of those in the field of public health. The newly released book, *Ready to Go: The History and Contributions of U.S. Public Health Advisors*, provides a distinctive and interesting window on public health and is a must read for public healthcare professionals as well as students of public health history and policy.

In this book, authors Beth Meyerson, Fred Martich, and Gerald Naehr tell the story of a unique public healthcare professional called the public health advisor or “PHA,” a federal employee sent on local, state, and international public health assignments by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide public health infrastructure as well as to serve as the immediate public health response. These men and women have been part of our public health complement since our war against syphilis in the late 1940s. Too often, public health is invisible when prevention is working best. These PHAs are the behind-the-scenes workers who have done so much to improve population health. Readers will get a tremendous tour of public health issues and challenges through the eyes of these operationally focused, street-savvy men and women who learned their craft first in the field doing disease epidemiology and were honed by a career of planned geographic and program transfers to ensure depth and breadth of public health experience.

Readers are given a tour of sexually transmitted disease history, followed by several stories charting the development of the national immunization effort and our tuberculosis effort. We witness the gender and ethnic/racial diversification of the PHA cadre, as well as the development of several other public health programs. While many will be familiar with the events of public health such as the dismantling of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, the Midwest floods, the smallpox crusade, and SARS, they will be newly introduced to CDC’s primary expression of immediate personnel response to public health crisis. The phrase “ready to go” may have been coined in the 1940s, but it remains part of the PHA psyche of being always prepared to serve the public anywhere in the world.

Ready to Go is the first book ever to be written about these inimitable men and women. Meyerson, Martich, and Naehr help several audiences gain access to the story of public health by bringing the voices of more than 150 PHAs from every decade of service and every conceivable public health situation. While this is a book for any student or scholar of public health, epidemiology, environmental health, health administration, or health policy, it is also an easy read for anyone who is interested in how this country responds to our health challenges. According to the publisher, faculty in schools of public health and undergraduate health programs have been assigning this book because it is one example of an exciting career in public health. In this time of reemerging interest in public service, this book gives an excellent example of an avenue of this service.

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