



## President's Letter

John Acquavella, *ACE President*

### Is Nothing Sacred?



I get frequent inquiries from College members about issues of importance to the field. Several recent inquiries have concerned conflict of interest, specifically allegations in an occupational epidemiology journal, and subsequently in newspaper articles, that Sir Richard Doll and other leading epidemiologists were influenced by undisclosed compensation from private industry. This is unusual fare for an article in an epidemiology journal. To me, the nature of the allegations and their

subsequent dissemination suggests that epidemiology societies need to propose guidelines on conflict of interest to support the proper and needed interaction between academia and industry. This is particularly important since funding for health research in the pharmaceutical sector alone exceeds the budget of the NIH. Epidemiology societies can help navigate the extremes between those who would discredit everyone associated with private industry and those who would disregard any concern about conflict of interest.

The allegations against Sir Richard are alarming, but illustrative. Sir Richard was perhaps the foremost epidemiologist of the modern era. ACE awarded him the Lilienfeld prize and, until his recent death at age 92, he worked tirelessly to advance the science of epidemiology. He was known for his courtesy and respect toward others, regardless of their prominence, affiliation or position on scientific issues. In fact, Sir Richard used his prominence to work for consensus and helped arrange several tripartite (government, academia, industry) conferences on important public health issues.

I worked with Sir Richard for 15 years (1989-2004) during my employment with Monsanto – the primary company alleged to have “influenced” Sir Richard’s scientific assessments. My tenure was soon after the time of the allegations of undisclosed compensation. However, during my interactions with Sir Richard, he never took a penny for himself. Instead, he requested that a consulting fee be given to the Oxford Green College general fund. This practice is followed by many academics who seek no personal gain from their consulting work for private industry. So, how likely is it that Sir Richard’s writings and testimonies did not reflect his own scientific judgment because of compensation from industrial sources? Is it more likely that those whose work was criticized see conflict of interest as a way to minimize valid scientific criticisms? This is the conundrum of conflict of interest allegations.

In researching this article, I did a Google search for Sir Richard. The first link was a Wikipedia entry subtitled “an epidemiologist gone awry.” [accessed 1/28/07] In the purely secular sense, this leads me to wonder: is nothing sacred? Wikipedia, ironically, has rules regarding neutrality from contributors. Is that

### Calendar of Events

**March 31**

[Deadline to Submit Student Papers](#)

**April 1**

[Deadline to submit abstracts](#)

**June 19 - 22**

[SER Annual Meeting](#)  
Boston, Massachusetts

**July 1, 2007**

Proposals due  
ACE New Initiative

**September 15-18, 2007**

[ACE Annual Meeting](#)  
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

entry a neutral view of the life and contributions of an epidemiologic icon? I think this illustrates that there are interests other than financial that need to be considered in the conflict of interest debate.

Epidemiology societies would greatly benefit the field by putting conflict of interest into proper perspective. The concern, of course, is that one's identity, employment or association should not prevent their scientific contributions from receiving fair consideration. This is both a policy and an ethical issue. The concern about a level scientific playing field is heightened by recently enacted requirements from the Journal of the American Medical Association that industry submissions must undergo independent reanalysis, and require a letter of agreement from the independent analyst, before they will be accepted for publication. Practices like this create two classes of epidemiologists which, applied broadly, will likely have a negative effect on the exchange of scientific thought. ACE is uniquely positioned to be helpful on conflict of interest. The membership of ACE has appreciable representation from government, academia and private industry. ACE has been a leading voice for the field on ethical and policy issues and recently helped organize a joint policy committee that includes several epidemiology societies. Finally, this would be true to the vision of ACE: to advocate for epidemiologists in their efforts to promote public health (through good science).

Conflict of interest has become the third rail of epidemiologic practice. I think that needs to change. In the meantime, I suggest we ask ourselves: Is nothing sacred?

## Top Stories – ACE 2007

### ACE 2007: 25th Anniversary Meeting <sup>1</sup>

Ed Trapido, *Program Chair*

Scientific questions are seldom answered through a single discipline like epidemiology; transdisciplinary and collaborative approaches are often required. New scientific fields abound, such as nanotechnology, the “omics” (e.g., proteomics, metabolomics), structural biology, and bioinformatics. Where does epidemiology fit into the development, application, and evaluation of practice, costs, and policy? How should epidemiologists communicate with disciplines that have different vocabularies, methodologies and are not population-based? How does epidemiology best embrace rapidly evolving technology, when some of them render existing epidemiologic methods obsolete? Is there a need to position epidemiology at a more appropriate level, where it can provide a better or more profound understanding of health and disease? This understanding will lead to the development of more meaningful policies, education, intervention, and programs.



During ACE's history, there have been tremendous changes in the areas of focus of epidemiology, the types of training, the interactions with other disciplines, the utilization of informatics, and the public's awareness of epidemiology. Now a quarter century old, the ACE is planning its 25th Anniversary meeting to pause and reflect on the past and consider the future. This meeting, “**Positioning Epidemiology for A Changing Environment: The Next 25 Years**”, <http://acepidemiology2.org/2007AM-Miami.htm> will be held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, September 15th to 18th, 2007, at the **Harbor Beach, Fort Lauderdale Resort and Spa** (a Marriott hotel) <http://www.marriottharborbeach.com>.

The local co-sponsor of the meeting is the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Miller School of Medicine, University of Miami. They will be working with the ACE Education Committee. The President of the University of Miami and former Health and Human Services Secretary, Dr. Donna E. Shalala, will welcome participants to the 25th Anniversary meeting.

The Opening Forum will address the National and Global Burden of Disease. It will include presentations by Dr. Matthew T. McKenna, Director, Office on Smoking and Health at the CDC and Roger Glass, Director of the Fogarty International Center at NIH.

Three Plenary Sessions are planned: “Ethics and Pandemic Preparedness”, “Policy”, and “Planning for 2030”. This latter session will recognize and elicit input from past ACE presidents and ACE Lilienfeld Award winners. In addition, the Annual Meeting will have a Special Awards Session, Student Posters, a discussion of Career Development Grants, a luncheon presentation on New Directions in Scientific Publication, and

Opening and Student Receptions. Pre-meeting educational workshops will be held on Saturday, September 15th and Sunday, September 16th. **At this time, ACE is seeking outstanding abstracts for the Poster Session.** Finally, there will be breakfast and Award Luncheon roundtables on current issues facing epidemiologists.

*Having not had an ACE Annual Meeting recently (the last planned meeting would have been held in New Orleans, but Hurricane Katrina had other plans), we are particularly hoping for a "significant" turnout at the 25th Anniversary meeting!*

<sup>1</sup>

Article Submitted by the ACE Education Committee in Consultation with the University of Miami.

## From the Board of Directors

### Melinda Aldrich, Associate Member Representative



Serving as the Associate Director continues to be a rewarding leadership experience. As ACE discovers new ways to involve Associate Members, I have had a number of opportunities to become engaged with committee activities and the Board. My goals during my term as the Associate Director are to 1) increase Associate Member membership, 2) survey current Associate Member needs, 3) plan the Associate Member Reception at the Annual Meeting, and 4) identify formal mentoring opportunities for Associate Members.

Coordinating activities for Associate Members has been a fantastic experience of ongoing communications and collaboration with other Associate Members, ACE Committees, and the Board of Directors. As a new member of the energetic Membership Committee, I have received insightful input for a flyer outlining the benefits of ACE membership which will be a tool to recruit potential new Associate Members. Working with fellow Associate Member, Annette Adams, we are beginning organization of the Associate Member reception for the upcoming Annual Meeting. What a great way to meet and work closely with another Associate Member! I also enjoy frequent conversations with our ACE president, John Acquavella, who has been incredibly supportive. This unique occasion to serve on the Board, coordinating Associate Member activities, is providing me with leadership skills and informal mentoring.

Now is the time to consider submitting your research for presentation at the upcoming Annual Meeting! As ACE Associate Members you are eligible to submit an abstract (April 1 deadline) for consideration for poster presentation. All posters will be judged and a cash prize will be given to the best poster by an Associate Member. ACE is also accepting submissions for the prestigious Student Prize Paper (March 31 deadline). Please see the ACE website for more details. As always, please feel free to contact me with your ideas, questions, or comments: [maldrich@berkeley.edu](mailto:maldrich@berkeley.edu).

## Committees

### ACE Career Mentoring Committee Lorann Stallones, *Committee Chair*

The ACE Mentoring Committee was created by a revision of the ACE By-Laws in September, 2006 and was charged with establishing and implementing a program to provide mentorship to all College members. The new Career Mentoring Committee is chaired by Lorann Stallones and co-chaired by Faith Davis. Members of the committee are Pauline Mendola, Jennifer Peel and Rob Schnatter. The committee has laid out a series of issues that they will be addressing over the coming months including: assisting with a social gathering where ACE Associate Members can meet with senior

### Fellows Corner Newly Appointed Fellows for Winter 2006

Bruce Alexander  
Kevin Gorey  
Hugh Mainzer



epidemiologists at the Annual Meeting; a session at the Annual Meeting to discuss new initiatives at NIH for career development; development of an ACE Workshop on mentoring; identifying financial support for training/mentoring; identification of ACE members interested in mentoring through the ACE membership data base; and establishing an ACE award for mentoring.

The impetus for the development for a new committee grew, in part, out of work that had been done by the Membership Committee under the guidance of Aaron Blair. An Ad Hoc Committee including Bill Kohl, Pauline Mendola, and Nora Lee prepared a detailed plan for mentoring that was to be used to increase membership benefits. Another Ad Hoc Committee Chaired by Martha Linet and Co-Chaired by Lorann Stallones which included John Aquavella and David Lilienfeld met during 2005-2006 to develop a plan to implement mentoring activities within ACE and this group proposed the development of a standing committee on Mentoring. In conjunction with a number of interested epidemiologists and students, a roundtable was developed for and offered at the Epidemiology Congress held in Seattle in 2006.

The Committee would welcome ideas and comments from ACE Members. You can e-mail Lorann Stallones at: [lorann@colostate.edu](mailto:lorann@colostate.edu). If you are interested in serving on the Career Mentoring Committee, you can also contact me. Anyone who has expressed an interest and has not heard from us, please accept my sincere apologies, I have been slow to add members and I do have some people on my list to be contacted over the next few months.

## Commentary

Once again the program committee for the ACE 2007 Annual Meeting is working diligently on our behalf. Please submit your papers and abstracts before the deadlines and mark your calendars to attend the meeting. Hm. Does business casual have a different meaning when in Miami? *Carol Burns, Editor* ([cburns@dow.com](mailto:cburns@dow.com)).

ACE News is published by the American College of Epidemiology

Editor: Carol Burns, [cburns@dow.com](mailto:cburns@dow.com)

For e-mail or other address changes, contact Angela Kite, [astockburger@firstpointresources.com](mailto:astockburger@firstpointresources.com)

Visit the ACE website at [www.acepidemiology.org](http://www.acepidemiology.org)

ACE

1500 Sunday Drive, Suite 102, Raleigh, NC 27607

Phone (919) 861-5573, Fax (919) 787-4916