



Thomas C. Meyer, MD

# A well-deserved salute to the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene

Thomas C. Meyer, MD, Medical Editor, WMJ

We were delighted to be asked to publish a centenary celebration issue devoted to the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene (WSLH)—surely the unsung basis for much of today's medical practice.

The request for this type of dedicated issue set a precedent, which led the Editorial Board to develop a policy identifying the parameters to be used in determining whether this and future possible requests would be considered. Stripped of its pompous “policy-ese” the decision was made to consider dedicating an issue to a single entity or organization if that entity is a public or non-profit entity that serves the entire state and is deemed of interest to *WMJ* readers. At most, we will print one dedicated issue a year.

With that policy in place, we forged ahead with this issue, and we are pleased with the result. This is our most voluminous issue in years, and we are grateful to the WSLH for easing our fiscal pain with a most generous grant.

We are also grateful for Dr Stan Inhorn's tireless efforts during the past several months—organizing, writing, editing, ensuring that authors met deadlines—and to WSLH's Terry Metcalf, Katie Dix, and Jan Klawitter for their work on this issue.

Our reactions as we reviewed the manuscripts were, generally, “Oh wow, I didn't know that,” and “So that's how they do it.” We hope yours is the same.

The first of the two guest editorials provide us with a WSLH history from its inception to the present with Dr Inhorn's meticulous, but eminently readable, account of the Lab's early days, its leadership and serial achieve-

ments, along with its symbiotic relationship with the University of Wisconsin Medical School (p 11). Dr Ron Laessig picks up the story in the present and takes the reader through the intrepid development of the Lab's “dual use capability” as it meets the necessities imposed by the possible use of chemical or bacteriological terrorism. He outlines for us the core functions of the Laboratory, both now and in the future so that one is left reassured that the assiduous planning and implementation will continue to provide substantial support to health professionals in our various roles in the care of Wisconsin citizens (p 17).

A series of thoughtful papers follow and expand on Dr Laessig's overview. They are organized by WSLH Division: Communicable Disease, Disease Prevention, and Environmental Health. In the communicable disease arena, authors provide us with a great deal of information relating to Influenza—a very appropriate review at the onset of the Influenza season (p 26), the status of Tuberculosis (p 31), and the WSLH's role in screening for common sexually transmitted diseases and bloodborne diseases, notably HIV and Hepatitis B and C viruses (p 35). Finally, we are guided through the history and current status of the detection and investigation of food- and waterborne enteric diseases and given a glimpse of the inside stories of some of the recent outbreaks of gastroenteritis (p 40).

The Disease Prevention Division provides an interesting mix, from describing WSLH's role in proficiency testing for the clinical labs throughout the state (p 56), to reporting on prenatal and cytogenetic screening, (p

65) and offering an historical update on the use of Dr Papanicolaou's test and the understanding of the role of the Human Papilloma Virus and cervical cancer (p 51). The current status of newborn screening (p 45) is also well summarized—from its earliest testing for phenylketonuria to the 26 disorders (primarily metabolic) sought in every baby born in Wisconsin today. At \$35 a test, it seems a good investment to detect approximately 4 PKU and 20 hypothyroid infants a year.

One of my personal “oh wows” came from the Environmental Health Division: an account of the WSLH's expanding role in terrorism preparedness. While one assumed that it must be involved somehow, it is interesting to learn the details (p 60). Equally, there is much interest in the report of the multiple toxic substances that have been the province of the Wisconsin Occupational Health Laboratory (p 71). A rather depressing report of the microbiological threats in the perhaps not-so-pristine waters of Wisconsin lakes and rivers warrants more than passing attention (p 76). Additional reports address the legal issues surrounding the collection of specimens for alcohol and drug testing, the scope of the possible tests, and the numbers of drugs detected in the 20,000 specimens with which the WSLH's toxicology program deals each year (p 79), and the WSLH's role in monitoring outdoor pollutants in selected Wisconsin communities (p 84).

These articles leave no doubt that we are extremely fortunate to have the support of such an aggressive and forward-looking institution in our state, and the *WMJ* salutes its fine work.



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