

Member Spotlight

Don Simmons

State Hygienic Laboratory, University of Iowa

Briefly describe your work and its relation to public health.

I currently work at the State Hygienic Laboratory at the University of Iowa (SHL) as the Laboratory manager of the Ankeny facility in Ankeny, Iowa. I have been with the laboratory for 20 years and I have a Masters and Ph.D. in Analytical Chemistry from the University of Oklahoma. Before I came to Iowa, I did a brief stint at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) working on Inorganic Toxicology with emphasis on lead issues. At the SHL, I have worked in several areas of the laboratory including newborn screening method development, metals testing, and blood lead testing. I work with Iowa citizens, agency leads and researchers to advance laboratory science to answer questions related to public and environmental health.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your work?

Working with other public health and environmental health professionals to help solve problems in the field is what I find most rewarding. So many times, we get calls from citizens who have exhausted all possibilities when trying to get someone who can help them with a water issue or understanding a result. It's very rewarding to be able to help folks with testing or information that can help them with their problem.

What led you to this career?

The post-doctoral work I did at CDC had me going full steam ahead into public health – I've never looked back.

What do you see as the greatest challenges and opportunities for public health in Iowa in the next two years?

Probably the greatest challenge is to keep the momentum up on issues such as water quality and new emerging contaminants that require more and more answers while at the same time funding and budgets get tighter and tighter. It seems like we only have enough resources to put fires out and never seem to get enough sustained funding to really demonstrate our



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value to the public and make a significant impact on improving public health.

What role do you think IPHA could play in meeting those opportunities?

IPHA has provided a voice for public health and medium for public health professionals to influence policy and public opinion, especially most recently with efforts to raise awareness of public health impacts of poor water quality and the need for more attention and resources to be put toward improving water quality.

IPHA has been a persistent champion when it comes to public health issues such as raw milk and food-borne illnesses. The need to support our local and state public health institutions is paramount to providing a sustained, effective public health system in Iowa.

I believe that IPHA should continue to be at the forefront of shaping public health policy and helping agencies and professionals in the field to educate and provide answers to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

IPHA History

The 1939 View of Public Health Nursing

By Dr. Ron Eckoff

The April-June 1939 *Iowa Health Bulletin* was devoted to Public Health Nursing. This was at a time when the field was expanding. The first VNA in Iowa was the Davenport Visiting Nurse Association, established in 1902. The first county public health nurse in Iowa was in Hardin County in 1917. The Iowa Department of Public Health established a separate Division of Public Health Nursing in 1937.

The 1939 *Bulletin* described the trends in Public Health Nursing, how to fit the program to the county and how to administer it. It also covered the pertinent laws and rules and the relation to the medical and dental professions. The *Bulletin* described in some detail the functions of Public

Health Nursing in relation to specific phases of the community health program, including:

- Maternity
- Infant and Preschool Health
- School Health
- Industrial Nursing
- Adult Health
- Communicable Disease (especially Tuberculosis, Syphilis and Gonorrhea)
- Non-Communicable Disease (including Orthopedic Service)
- Vital Statistics
- Sanitation

IPHA History continued...

The details regarding maternity, infant, preschool, and school health are provided below. Every county is different, but it was suggested in the *Bulletin* that sixty percent of the activity is likely to be in these phases. The entire *Bulletin* has been posted to the [Public Health History in Iowa page](#) of the IPHA web site.

Maternity

The public health nurse:

1. Gets in touch with prospective mothers and assists in securing medical and dental examinations and supervision early in pregnancy and throughout the antepartum period.
2. Assists in planning and preparing for confinement and in securing a postpartum medical examination.
3. Gives or arranges for nursing care throughout the maternity cycle, including assistance at home confinements and care to the mother and baby during the postpartum period.
4. Teaches through demonstration and supervises care given by relatives, attendants, and midwives.
5. Helps the family to carry out specific medical advice as to maternal hygiene and infant care.
6. Participates in promoting adequate resources for maternity care through utilizing appropriate channels of community education.

Infant and Preschool Health

The public health nurse:

1. Assists in securing complete birth registration.
2. Assists in securing medical supervision, dental examination and correction of defects for every child.
3. Gives or arranges for nursing care for sick children, teaches through demonstration and supervises care given by relatives and attendants.
4. Assists in the control of communicable diseases through teaching the recognition of early symptoms, the importance of isolation and the value of immunization.
5. Participates in programs for the prevention of handicaps and the care and education of handicapped children.
6. Assists the family to carry out general and specific medical advice concerning proper feeding, with emphasis on the techniques of breast feeding.
7. Assists the family to carry out general and specific medical instruction concerning hygiene and the daily regime of the child including instruction of parents in the desirability of early establishment of sound health habits.

School Health

The public health nurse:

1. Participates in formulating and developing a health education program based on the needs of the pupils.
2. Assists physicians in the examination of pupils and the interpretation of findings to teachers, parents, and children.
3. Teaches the value of adequate health supervision and facilities for medical care and assists in securing correction of defects.
4. Inspects pupils and instructs teachers, parents, and pupils to observe and recognize deviations from normal health.
5. Assists in the control of communicable disease through teaching the recognition of early symptoms, the importance of isolation and the value of immunization.
6. Promotes the maintenance of a healthful school environment – physical, emotional and social.
7. Arranges for the care of emergency and minor injuries and illnesses in accordance with medical standing orders.
8. Participates in a program for the prevention of handicaps and the care and education of handicapped children.
9. Develops relationships to coordinate school nursing activities with all other health forces of school, home, and community and to promote community health resources.
10. Participates in curriculum making. Nurses who are qualified may instruct classes in principles of healthy living and care of the sick.

In describing how to fit the program to the county, there were three suggestions which, while worded differently, were similar to what might be said today:

1. Study the community needs and resources in cooperation with the interested leaders and committee members, and build the nursing service program accordingly.
2. Plan a tentative program keeping in mind the desirability of the educational and preventive programs and others which aid in the promotion of public health.
3. Ascertain from groups engaged in any phase of health work the scope of their activities and secure their cooperation. Programs of other agencies, their methods and purposes, should be understood thoroughly and an effort made to pool resources and combine programs so that duplication may be avoided.

Reality check

As I was working on this, I was thinking this was something ancient. Then it struck me, I was one year old when this was published. Not ancient at all!