I am honored to serve as President of the Alabama Public Health Association this year. I am looking forward to a year full of educational opportunities and partnerships with our Board of Directors. I hope you were all able to join us at last year's educational conference. Tim Hatch was our President, and Natalie Quinney was last year's Vice President. Both of these individuals did an outstanding job in providing leadership for our organization, and Natalie did a superlative job of organizing and planning for us all.

This year Kimberly Gordon will serve as our Vice President and Conference Program Chair. She has already started planning for the 2016 AIPHA Conference. The theme for this year's meeting is “Public Health: Advancing Opportunities and Assessing Challenges.” John F. Kennedy once said, “Change is the law of life, and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” As we start into a new year with the AIPHA board we can already see that Public Health will be experiencing A LOT of changes. As all of us deal with changes differently in life, I challenge each of you at Public Health to remember to focus on our future and remember that with changes come opportunities. Change is never comfortable at first, but without change we would never move forward.

Speaking of changes one of these changes includes our State Health Officer, Don Williamson, M.D., retiring from his years of state service and leadership. We want to thank him for his years of support to the Alabama Public Health Association, and at the Alabama Department of Public Health. Just in the past few years Regional Care Organizations (RCO’s), accreditation and electronic health records are all moving forward. We have been lucky to have Dr. Williamson guiding us through all of these emerging Public Health changes, and hate to see him depart; however, we do want to wish him the best in his new endeavor, and know he will do an excellent job as President/CEO for the Alabama Hospital Association. We hope that Dr. Williamson will remain active in AIPHA, and hope to see him at this year's meeting.

This year's AIPHA meeting will take place at the Auburn Marriott Opelika Hotel & Conference Center at Grand National. This is a beautiful setting for this year’s meeting (and best of all it is near A-U-B-U-R-N........Anyone who knows me well knew I had to say it!). The dates for this year’s upcoming meeting are April 6 – 8, 2016. More information will soon follow on our AIPHA website. You can access our AIPHA website by going to http://alphassoc.org. We look forward to a great educational conference, and hope that you make plans to join us. As always, continuing education credits will be awarded, so plan to see us in April 2016.

Once again, thank you again for giving me the honor to serve as this year’s AIPHA President. Should you have any questions about the upcoming conference or becoming a member of AIPHA, feel free to contact me at 251-275-7103.

Suzanne Terrell, LGSW
2015-2016 AIPHA President
The Alabama Public Health Association recognized individuals and groups from across the state who have demonstrated exceptional merit during the past year in the field of public health. The following were presented awards at the association’s 59th Annual Meeting and Health Education Conference at the Embassy Suites in Montgomery April 9.

The Anne M. Smith Public Health Nurse of the Year Award was presented to Cathy Wright, R.N., clinic nurse at the Hale County Health Department. The recipient of this award must exemplify the mission of public health nursing in Alabama, that is “to assure conditions in which individuals, families and communities can be healthy utilizing the unique expertise of public health nurses to assess, plan and implement programs which promote health and prevent disease.”

Mrs. Wright has been a clinic nurse for nearly 25 years, and remarked that she is amazed that she is now seeing the fourth generation of health department patients. She is described as “a valued voice to her peers” and “a true example of selfless service to her patients, the agency and her community.” In addition to her dedication on the job, she volunteers for other activities such as speaking to various groups and serving on the Hale County Children’s Policy Council.

The Frederick S. Wolf Award was presented to Dr. Bill Goetter of Fairhope. This award was established in 1982 to recognize an individual who has been active in public health at the local level for more than 10 years; who has demonstrated efficiency, dedication and professionalism in delivery of public health services; and who has provided unselfish community services in areas unrelated to public health. Among his many accomplishments, Dr. Goetter led the effort to establish the Alabama Free Clinic, a medical clinic in Baldwin County that offers free services to those who cannot afford health care. He worked with State Rep. Walter Penry who sponsored a bill providing liability protection to medical volunteers rendering uncompensated services that resulted in passage of a law. He met with local physicians, hospital administrators and others to form partnerships to staff the clinic, has been instrumental in its success, and still serves on its board of the first established free medical clinic in Alabama.

Nominators wrote that Dr. Goetter is “committed to making Baldwin County a healthier place to live,” “his commitment and dedication are unsurpassed,” and “he does not care who receives the credit” as he often serves behind the scenes. Dr. Goetter was the major driving force in opening the Alabama Free Clinic (AFC), and under his leadership, AFC received the Dr. Ira L. Myers Award for Excellence in Public Health. This award was established in 1987 to honor the former State Health Officer for his accomplishments by recognizing an individual, group or organization that, through excellence in work, has made a significant impact on some aspect of public health in Alabama.

AFC began offering services to the low-income and indigent people in Baldwin County in 1995.
For the first few years, AFC operated with a 100-member volunteer staff of clerks, nurses and physicians. Today, the AFC has three locations with a full-time director and two nurses. Physicians, nurses, hospitals and laboratories all donate their time, effort and services to meet the medical needs of AFC clients. AFC provided approximately $750,000 in free medical treatment and services to the citizens of Baldwin County in 2014, served 1,228 patients, and provided nearly $740,000 worth of prescription medication savings. AFC has recruited and expanded its services to include pulmonary diagnostics, perpetual care, wound care, dental care, and has laid the foundation for the launch of eye health/vision services—all at no charge to the clients.

The D.G. Gill Award is intended to honor an individual who has made an exceptional contribution to public health in Alabama. The Alabama Public Health Association presented this award to Denise Pope of Public Health Area 7. The D.G. Gill Award was the first award established by the association and was created in 1967 to honor former State Health Officer Dr. D.G. Gill.

Mrs. Pope has devoted more than 30 years to serving WIC participants at both the clinic and area levels. Letters of support commended her for her dedication to her work. One remarked, “She is one of those special people that has the talent to do the behind-the-scenes work to make a project or meeting come together.” She has served as a subject matter expert for the WIC Crossroads Management Information System. This eight-year project involved collaboration with four states to design and develop an electronic WIC record that met the needs of the Alabama WIC program. Mrs. Pope worked countless hours on this project not only in the design phase, but also by piloting the project. She assisted with training and statewide implementation.

Over the years, Mrs. Pope has been involved in innovative ways to provide accessibility to the WIC program by those who need it most. Her area was one of the first to provide hospital-based WIC certifications, mobile WIC clinics, after hours clinics, and church-based WIC clinics. One supporter noted, “Mrs. Pope is truly a problem solver with compassion for the people she serves and for her colleagues with whom she shares a workplace. Mrs. Pope does not view her job to be just the nutrition director, she sees herself as a team player for the department.”

Noelle Ahmann, marketing specialist with the Communications and Social Marketing Division, Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease, was presented the Virginia Kendrick Award. This award is given annually to an individual who has provided notable service to the people of Alabama while serving in a supportive position in the field of public health.
In her position, Ms. Ahmann produces professional quality work that results in clear, informational, promotional and educational materials that are essential to assure people have the knowledge they need to be alert to public health issues, services, recommendations, requirements, and disease and injury prevention interventions. Supporters praised her for enabling others to do their jobs in promoting healthful behaviors to a wide range of audiences. Letters of support stated, “She is dedicated and works smoothly with others to balance the goals of programs with the communications methodologies that must be utilized in her work.”

Commander Melissa Ann Morrison was presented the Guy M. Tate Award, an award given annually to a public health employee, group or agency with 10 years or less in public health for outstanding current or recent service or contribution to public health. CDR Morrison has had a substantial impact on the health and safety of Alabama’s citizens as she carries out her duties as a Career Epidemiology Field Officer with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention assigned to the Alabama Department of Public Health.

CDR Morrison began her current assignment in Alabama in May 2009 during the second week of the H1N1 influenza response. Since then, she has been involved in several joint federal and ADPH public health emergency responses, including investigation of health impacts of an extended weather-related water shortage, the Alabama tornado outbreak in April 2011, investigation of potential patient exposure to strontium, and assessment of community exposure to mercaptan. Most recently, she was responsible for coordinating ADPH Ebola planning efforts and was deployed to CDC headquarters to serve on the State Coordination Task Force.

Two former association leaders and office holders were inducted into the Alabama Public Health Association Hall of Fame, Class of 2015: Ross Hudson of Scottsboro and Albert Woolbright, Ph.D., of Montgomery. The Hall of Fame recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the enhancement and advancement of the association.
This fall we have as many undergraduate students as we do newly enrolled masters students. For a program that is less than two years old, we are amazed, excited and scrambling to find space and at times faculty for some of the multi-section courses.

An undergraduate program that is growing faster than anyone expected presents a wonderful set of challenge. But, most importantly it bodes well for the future of public health. The undergraduate students are highly motivated to learn about public health, are deeply interested in the complex issues that you face every day, and are driven to make a difference. They scour all the news sources they can to find stories about public health, and then bring these stories to the School for answers and better understanding.

From the occupational exposures of nail salon workers to concerns about the health of the Syrian refugees to wanting to understand the heroin epidemic to the challenges of sexual assaults on college campuses, these students have a world view of public health that is wide and deep. They are quickly learning that public health gives them the tools and perspective to tackle our most complicated problems with energy and creativity.

I have no doubts about the legacy of contributions to the State of Alabama by the UAB School of Public Health. I also have no doubt that legacy will pale in comparison to the impacts these young women and men who are now majoring in public health will have on our state in the future. I look forward to the time when we can boast some of the best health statistics in the nation because these women and men integrated public health into their professional lives as elected officials, corporate leaders, public health professionals, and religious leaders.

Max Michael, M.D.
Dean, UAB School of Public Health
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