

Nestle. Readers may contact me at 513-634-3938 or <middleton.sj@pg.com> for further information.

Olean is a replacement for fat, not for common sense. Combined with a balanced diet, moderate portion sizes, and proper exercise, it's a step in the right direction to help consumers achieve and maintain good health. Here at P&G we look back on Olean's development with pride and look forward with confidence because, once again, the consumer has voted.

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Photo Was "Right On"

My hat goes off to PHR for the *News and Notes* item "Health Ranks Fifth on Local TV News" (Jul/Aug 1998; 113:296-7). The photo of the male couple with matching rings and earrings watching TV was "right on" with the substance behind the article because the entire gay community is affected by health issues, which have changed our daily lives and the way in which we are socialized and interact with each other. Health concerns continue to promote fears, anxieties, and the reality of death in the gay community in a larger percentage (not total numbers) than in any other minority group in our society.

Despite increasing demand for reporting of health issues, these issues may not be the priority agenda on local news networks—but they rank number one in any gay-oriented publication nationwide. Our lives depend on the reporting of this information.

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IOM on Core Functions

The Editor points out ["Through the Editor's Looking Glass: Humpty Dumpty's Rule," Nov/Dec 1998;113:479] that the terms *assessment*, *policy development*, and *assurance* adopted by the Institute of Medicine in 1988 to define the core functions of public health agencies at all levels of government have been problematic to some in the field. We think few would argue that *The Future of Public Health* sparked critical discussions within the field and that the report's language provided needed, if imperfect, tools to use in those discussions. Today, the functions described in 1988 remain central to protecting and promoting public health, even if the vocabulary has not been embraced by all public health practitioners or researchers. More important, we are concerned that the concepts have not been well understood or appreciated by the public to whom we are responsible.

One of the challenges within public health has been to separate out the language and concepts most useful to discussion and development within the field, and those most useful for dialogue with the public and policy makers. There have been some efforts to make "assessment, policy development and assurance" serve both purposes. Efforts to construct more specific language to represent these concepts within the field have been moderately successful, but less attention has been given to the implications of the vocabulary for promoting public discourse and understanding of public health issues. Nevertheless, polls show that despite unfamiliarity with terms used within the profession, the public supports the activities carried out by public health practitioners.

We are aware of both the interest in and confusion engendered by these terms. We have heard about this directly—such as at a session we

sponsored at the recent joint annual meeting of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the National Association of County and City Health Officials—and indirectly, as we have conducted our studies on specific public health issues.

The Institute hopes to embark in the coming months on a new initiative on public health through our Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. A key task for the initiative will be to reconsider both the core functions of public health and the vocabulary used to describe them. In a separate activity we also hope to address the research agenda for public health and prevention. We look forward to input on this from the Editor and the readers of *Public Health Reports* as we progress. Comments on the terminology can be sent for our future consideration to <iom_hpdp@nas.edu>.

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