

In this Issue: Data to Decision Making

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“If we have data, let’s look at data. If all we have are opinions, let’s go with mine.” – Jim Barksdale, former Netscape CEO

Our very existence is predicated on observation and interpretation of our environment. In the past, as now, a missed observation or incorrect interpretation can spell the difference between thriving – or merely surviving, and between surviving or dying.

One could argue that the practice of public and population health is the practice of gathering data, turning it into useful information, displaying it in understandable formats, and using the resulting understanding to develop predictive and responsive solutions that move us toward thriving.

Historically there have been significant barriers to gathering and interpreting data – a major one being that data, by definition, is observed at a point in time. When we add observer bias, correlation/ causation mistakes, sample size issues, and not asking the correct questions for the answer we are seeking – reasonable people can make erroneous judgements.

In spite of this, the news is good, and getting better every day as leaps forward in computer assisted processing of “big data.” In addition, our own understanding of how to better collect and understand data improves every day.

In part, that “getting better every day” is what this issue on “From Data to Decision Making” is all about....drawing more accurate conclusions and creating better interventions and policies.

The Delaware Academy of Medicine / Delaware Public Health Association is dedicated to science-based discipline and solutions, and is honored to work with the Division of Public Health, University of Delaware – Partnership for Healthy Communities, and many others. Specifically, we are engaged in the work of the **State Health Improvement Plan**, a focus of this issue. Also, in late March we will be rolling out the latest **County Health Rankings** for the State in partnership with the Public Health Management Corporation.

The guest editor for this issue of the Journal is former cabinet secretary, and current University of Delaware Professor Rita Landgraf, and we thank her for her role in making this issue a reality.

As ways, we hope you enjoy this issue, and find it thought-provoking and engaging.

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