On Campus

Public Health Dean Rosenfield to Step Down

Summer 2006

Allan Rosenfield, dean of the Mailman School of Public Health since 1986, has asked the University to begin a search for a new dean. Although suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Rosenfield says that “health permitting,” he will remain as dean until the University chooses his successor, and that he will stay on as a professor.

An obstetrician-gynecologist by training, Rosenfield ’59CC is renowned for his work in the field of women’s reproductive health, family planning, and maternal mortality, particularly in resource-poor communities, both in the United States and abroad. Rosenfield has also developed innovative programs to treat HIV-infected adults and children, and, in Lee Bollinger’s words, “has relentlessly advocated for increasing health-care access and human rights around the world.” Under his stewardship, the Mailman School has grown to become the third largest school of public health in the United States, and the second largest school in the University in terms of enrollment and budget.

On June 8, a Columbia University World Leaders Forum symposium entitled “Taking a Stand: Challenges and Controversies in Reproductive Health, Maternal Mortality, and HIV/AIDS” was held in Rosenfield’s honor. The keynote address was given by Bill Clinton. Other speakers included Mary Robinson, SIPA professor, former president of Ireland, and UN high commissioner for human rights; Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia’s Earth Institute; Stephen Lewis, a UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS; and William Foege, an epidemiologist and human rights activist. The previous evening, Rosenfield was honored with a gala dinner hosted by Bollinger. Speakers included UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, actor and AIDS activist Richard Gere, and Phyllis Mailman, widow of Joseph L. Mailman, for whom the Mailman School is named. On June 7, Bollinger announced that the main building of the Mailman School, at 722 West 168th Street, will be named in Rosenfield’s honor.

“All of that is very moving, very emotional, and very much appreciated,” Rosenfield says. “I have tremendous respect and admiration for my colleagues in many areas of public health and the organizations they work for, and it’s very special that so many have chosen to honor my work and that of the school.”

Looking back on his 30-year career at Columbia, Rosenfield says that he is proudest of his role in moving the Mailman School into the “top ranks” of public health schools, along with his ongoing work on public health issues, especially that involving the health and well-being of women, domestically and globally. When Rosenfield became dean, the Mailman School’s budget was about $12 million; today it is $160 million. He attributes much of the school’s success to the “outstanding faculty we’ve been able to recruit.”

But Rosenfield is looking ahead as well. Among the challenges facing public health in the foreseeable future, he cites health-care reform in the United States as a top priority: “We need to see the advent of a single-payer system, which will save administrative costs and provide care for all people.” Globally, “our work must continue to improve women’s reproductive health, including family planning, decreasing unsafe abortions, and reducing the number of women dying of complications from pregnancy, and dealing with the tragic impact of HIV/AIDS on women,” says Rosenfield, who is well known for his advocacy on all these issues, as well as for education on the use of condoms and other forms of birth control, and the importance of raising the social status of women in developing nations. “Women in many countries are at a great disadvantage,” he says, “and we must continue to give special attention to their needs.”



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