

From Cancer to Ebola— Lori A. Pollack, MD '99, MPH, is Making Her Mark in Public Health

Lori A. (Loria) Pollack, MD '99, MPH, freely admits Rutgers and Robert Wood Johnson Medical School are a family tradition. “I’m a New Jersey girl and still drive around with a big ‘R’ on the back of my car,” she says. Her father, Edmund Heilmeyer, attended pharmacy school at Rutgers in the 1950s. Dr. Pollack also met her husband, Brian, while he was enrolled in Rutgers’ MD/PhD program.

Family ties aside, Dr. Pollack decided on Robert Wood Johnson Medical School because of the unique MD/MPH dual degree. Public health was her choice because she believes that although clinical doctors can affect the health of a panel of patients, public health physicians can impact the health of entire populations. She serves as a medical epidemiologist and has a rank of captain in the U.S. Public Health Service, a unique uniform service with a history going back more than 200 years. Dr. Pollack is currently assigned to the Division of Cancer

Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) headquarters in Atlanta.

Since she joined the Public Health Service, her career has been nothing short of remarkable. Dr. Pollack has spearheaded federally funded research, provided scientific oversight for high-profile projects, helped train hundreds of health professionals, led an international task force, and conducted high-impact research. She has also authored or co-authored more than 50 publications and 50 national presentations and received dozens of recognitions and awards—including a Presidential Citation.

Most recently, Dr. Pollack was responsible for the scientific oversight of analyses resulting from a National Program of Cancer Registries study that obtained detailed information on biomarkers and treatment of more than 75,000 new breast, colorectal, and leukemia cases. This special study will enable researchers to compare effectiveness in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

Cancer prevention and screening are two of her top priorities. “In cancer prevention and control, we look at communities that need care and determine the evidence-based practices to reach them,” Dr. Pollack says. “For example, we support a national program for breast and cervical cancer screenings for women who are underinsured and use our cancer registry information to target screening and HPV immunization.” For Dr. Pollack, these kinds of public health initiatives reflect a higher level of caring that affects an entire community.

She also has a special interest: cancer survivorship. “There is a basic education and messaging out there about screening—but it’s also important to

BY LYND A RUDOLPH



COURTESY OF LORI A. POLLACK, MD '99, MPH

encourage the medical community to look at the needs of people after cancer.” Dr. Pollack has been involved in helping define the role of public health for cancer survivors.

Dual-board-certified in internal medicine and general preventive medicine, Dr. Pollack has additional training in the CDC’s Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS), on policy, management, and program evaluation. Although she has a desk job regarding cancer, Dr. Pollack can also be called to work when there’s a disease outbreak or after a natural disaster. “Everyone’s on alert now for Zika,” she says, adding, “I had a role in Ebola for preparing U.S. hospitals in

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the event of domestic outbreak.” She has also been deployed after hurricanes to monitor special-needs shelters, provided expertise at CDC’s call center to assist doctors around the United States in identifying the SARS

virus and acquiring cultures, and was part of the preparedness team when the West Nile virus was first identified in Louisiana.

Dr. Pollack emphasizes the fact that the CDC is the scientifically sound organization that makes decisions and recommendations affecting everyone. Since she first arrived to work for the CDC in Atlanta, she’s seen the organization grow in its ability to meet responses with public health preparedness. “They have to monitor, mobilize, and evaluate, always keeping a finger on the pulse of modern medicine and policies—and provide timely, sound information for Congress to make decisions,” she explains.

Looking back on her decision to attend Rutgers, Dr. Pollack feels that diversity was one of the biggest benefits. “Because Rutgers is very skills-based and offers quality public education in a state that’s diverse racially, linguistically, and economically, I received an educational experience that isn’t available at most private schools.” You could make the case that her decision contributed to the work she does to improve the health of millions. **M**