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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The health of the public, and the government's responsibility to protect the public's health, has received renewed attention over the last two decades. The most obvious impetus of this focus has been the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the acts of bioterrorism that followed. These events forced both the United States and the world at large to recognize the relative lack of preparation any nation or people can have for a catastrophic event, and to struggle with the implications of granting significant coercive power to governments to respond to these threats. On a more quotidian level, the growing problem of obesity in the United States and our current shortage of flu vaccinations has returned to remind us of the inadequacies of our system to address even the most basic public health needs. Equally interesting is whether government should regulate "healthy eating" or participate in rationing limited supplies of prophylactic treatments. Globally, the spread of SARS and other infectious diseases has served to remind the world of the fragility of the human population, regardless of our technical prowess and scientific understanding. The authors of the essays in this issue of the *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* are as well placed as any scholars in the world to think about these problems, and to begin to propose possible solutions.

This is the third annual Public Health symposium published by *JLME*. As with the two previous symposia, this issue is guest-edited by Lawrence Gostin of Georgetown University, a leading scholar on public health and the law and a long-time member of the American Society of Law, Medicine & Ethics. As usual, Gostin has brought together some of the most interesting scholars on public health and the law from around the world, with views and perspectives varied enough to reflect the rich field of study that is public health. We are especially pleased to dedicate this symposium to Bernard Dickens, a scholar of immense influence who has touched the lives of scores of students, as well as a past recipient of ASLME's Health Law Teacher award. Dickens began work in Public Health Law back when it was a relatively new field and, through his prodigious publishing and admirable dedication to his students, continues to make enormously important contributions today.

Finally, please note that *JLME* has added yet another regular column to its list of features. "The Ethical Health Lawyer" will be a quarterly column edited by University of Houston professors Joan Krause and Richard Saver. This issue's installment serves as an introduction, explaining what the column will do and what questions it will ask. I encourage you all to read it and let us know what you think.

*Ted Hutchinson*  
Editor