

**For the Department of Epidemiology
From Dr. Sidney Kark
September 4, 1997**

In the latter 1950's, Dr. Ed McGavran, Dean of the School of Public Health, invited me to initiate a Department of Epidemiology within the school. It was at the time that Emily and I were planning to leave South Africa for political reasons.

We and our family of three arrived in Chapel Hill in 1958 and settled in to an enjoyable and stimulating stay, with friendly hospitable people and pleasant surroundings. Before accepting the appointment, I had indicated to Dean McGavran my previous commitment to another post as visiting World Health Organization Professor of Social Medicine to the Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical School in Jerusalem, Israel. Therefore I could only remain for one year at the School.

Dr. John Cassel was the first appointment to this new Department of Epidemiology. He had been a close colleague and friend of ours in South Africa over many years, and had left to join the UNC School of Public Health five years previously. He had invited a number of people to join the staff: these included Dr. Ralph Patrick, Social Anthropologist and Dr. John Fulton, Community Dentistry, and later, Dr. Al Tyroler, an epidemiologist who had been conducting Industrial Health projects in North Carolina. The Dean and Sidney completed the founding group. Dr. Kerr Whyte of the Department of Internal Medicine and Dr. John Filley, psychiatrist, of the UNC Medical School, also linked with us.

The main subjects taught were the traditional epidemiological topics, and in addition an aspect with which the department was especially concerned, that is, the role of epidemiology in primary health care, both as a subject of interest to general practitioners in their individual practices and as an interest in itself. Later the department collaborated in a long term cardiovascular epidemiological study with Dr. Curtis Hames, a general practitioner in Claxton, Georgia, the Evans County Study. Emphasis was placed on the social and cultural determinants of health and disease.

The concept of epidemiologic surveillance with which my colleagues and I based our practice and teaching was introduced on the following lines:

Studies or service based on a population or community require consideration of its health status, together with its biological, social and cultural characteristics, and its environmental and material resources.

This involves two broad areas of health related actions:

- * Integration of personal and environmental health services, community organization and health promotion.
- * Relating these with the community's changing health status and its determining factors. Special attention needs to be given to the people's concepts of cause and effect of illness.

After that very enjoyable year in Chapel Hill, we left with much regret. It had really been our second home, thanks to the wonderful hospitality of John and Margaret Cassel, their family and friends, as well as that of the many good friends we had made during our stay in the department and the school.

We have since kept our links with Chapel Hill, having returned to visit a number of times over the years, as had our son, Jeremy, who received a PhD in Epidemiology from the Department almost two decades after our leaving.

John Cassel, a leader in social epidemiology, went on to develop an internationally renowned department, which, through its excellence, has continued to develop strong and varied research and teaching programs, continually attracting students and visiting scientists worldwide.