Dear Friends of the College of Public Health:

“Eternal Vigilance is the price of liberty.”

Though attributed to Thomas Jefferson, the origin of that quote remains uncertain. Its meaning, however, resounds across the centuries. Needless to say, the quote is remarkably relevant to our work in Public Health. We know, for example, that it takes constant vigilance to keep us free from disease—even those diseases that we might not usually consider a threat.

Two epidemics remind us of this:

1) The first is the epidemic of measles in the United States. As of August 1, the CDC reports that 2014 has seen 593 confirmed measles cases in the United States—the highest number reported since measles was declared to be eliminated (“interruption of year-round endemic transmission”) in the United States in 2000. The CDC reports following 18 outbreaks that have resulted in cases in 21 states, including Tennessee. [http://www.cdc.gov/measles/](http://www.cdc.gov/measles/) Measles cases in the United States in 2014 appear to be due to two factors: a) the importation of measles by travelers from other countries; and b) the spread of the disease among unvaccinated people in the United States. A worrisome number of parents continue to put their children at risk by not having them vaccinated . . . interrupting “public health vigilance” and risking the health of their children.

2) The major on-going outbreak of Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever in west Africa. As of August 5, the CDC reports over 1,600 suspected and confirmed cases of Ebola virus disease and almost 900 deaths from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria. I would strongly encourage everyone to review the Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever homepage for the CDC: [http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html) or the one for the WHO: [http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/) These provide basic information about the disease, and will answer many questions and address many concerns. It is important to understand that Ebola is only known to be transmitted by direct contact with blood or other body fluids, and the disease is only communicable after the patient becomes ill. For those reasons, the people most likely to be exposed to Ebola are healthcare workers and family members. Vigilance, therefore, remains vital, on the part of healthcare workers, public health professionals, and members of the general public.

If nothing else, these two epidemics remind us that the many fields covered by the term “public health” remain as relevant today as they have ever been. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty . . . and health.

--Best Wishes,