

## Pedagogy and Policy: A Tribute to Karen Rothenberg's Contributions to Health Law

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# PEDAGOGY AND POLICY: A TRIBUTE TO KAREN ROTHENBERG'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO HEALTH LAW

MICHAEL R. ULRICH, J.D., M.P.H.\*

Professor Karen Rothenberg has had a significant influence on my life, impacting my education, my career, and the way I think. Professor Rothenberg has been a pillar in the health law community, but perhaps her most lasting impact for myself was creating the health law program at the University of Maryland, Francis King Carey School of Law. This nationally recognized program grew from her passion, expertise, and recognition of the importance of health, and is *the* reason I chose to attend the University of Maryland. The curriculum, faculty, and experience made it one of the best decisions of my life and has continued to influence me to this day. For Professor Rothenberg's role creating the program, helping it to evolve and grow, and continuing to prioritize it as Dean, I will be forever grateful. Yet, her contributions to my life and career did not end there.

One of the most rewarding, influential experiences I had in law school was the course "Health and Science Policy Workshop: The Regulation of Genomic Research." I knew I was interested in health policy, but at times it was difficult to understand what a career in the health law field would entail. Understanding the limitations of the typical law school courses that provide students with only a glimpse into health policy "in action," Professor Rothenberg, along with her co-instructor Benjamin Berkman, set out to create a unique course that would enable a more practical experience in policymaking. Professor Rothenberg contributed significantly as a co-instructor in the course, but without her relationship with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) the class undoubtedly would never have been a possibility.

Having served as an active policy maker herself in various roles at NIH, Professor Rothenberg was the perfect person to create a course that would engage

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students in not only theory, but the practicalities of addressing current issues under realistic constraints. Utilizing the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) as the “client,” we as a group set out to answer cutting-edge questions in genomic research that experts at the NIH were currently attempting to address.

It was bold for Professor Rothenberg to put her reputation and relationship with those at NIH on the line for a group of law students who had little to no experience in genomic research or making policy. Her recognition of the limitations in traditional law school pedagogy proved fortuitous for myself and my classmates. We were encouraged to engage with the material and think through the issues critically so that *we* could answer these questions. The goal was not to simply provide information to someone more experienced. It was to convince them that the conclusion we came to, after months of strenuous research, conversations with stakeholders, and debates within our class, was the proper answer.

Whether the policymakers ultimately adopted our recommendations wholesale was not the point. Instead, the objective was to feel that we had as good a reason as any to share our thoughts and arguments. To be empowered as a student, to believe that you have a voice that deserves to be heard, is an experience that is far too rare for students in law school. Personally, this experience contributed to my growing affinity for research and writing, and provided confidence in my ability to analyze complex, pressing health law problems.

Going from knowing little about genomic research at the start of the semester, to presenting salient analysis to experts by the end was not only rewarding as an intellectual and educational endeavor, it also confirmed my desire to pursue an academic career. The workshop gave me a glimpse at what it would be like to develop and utilize analytical skills to address critical, contemporary health problems and influence the policies that would address them.

But it also helped guide my approach as a law professor. One of the workshop’s primary focuses was teaching students the importance of collaboration. Not only within the classroom, but between lawyers, ethicists, scientists, and policymakers. As a health law professor, it is critical to educate students on the role of lawyers in addressing public health challenges. This is a lesson I learned early in law school, confirmed in the workshop, and now try to include in my own teaching.

Professor Rothenberg is a leader and force in the field of health law, not simply because of publication placements and lengthy articles (though her publication list is certainly lengthy). Professor Rothenberg has been so influential, to myself and others, because she always made a point to remember the real-world practicalities of her writings and classroom teachings. And,

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ultimately, what those in health law should be striving for: addressing public health problems to improve health outcomes. The workshop is simply one example of her work in this regard, but it was an important early lesson for me to keep in mind that, despite the demands on legal academia, the focus of health law should be addressing disparities, especially for the most vulnerable and underserved.

Professor Rothenberg influenced my career not only in her role as an instructor for the workshop but, as a health law educator myself, in her contribution to the evolving recognition, expansion, and respect for health law. Without her as a leader in the field it is unlikely that I or many others involved in health law would be able to dedicate nearly the amount of time we do on the issues we are truly passionate about. Thus, Professor Rothenberg has played a direct role as a professor at Maryland, but has had an even broader impact by shaping the many that now influence others. Her impact will be felt well into the future. For this, I am truly grateful, as are, I am certain, many others.