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Commissioner

"Standing On The Shoulders Of Others"

"About the same," is the response Joe Odell would invariably give to my 'Hi Joe, how's it going?' as we passed one another during a work day at the DMHAS Office of the Commissioner. Joe's response was always voiced in an unpretentious manner and usually with a smile.

I attended Joe's retirement celebration in mid January as well as one for Richard J. Lynch, Assistant Attorney General. Dick had 30+ years of state service and led the Health and Education unit that provides legal counsel and representation for my office and DMHAS as well as a host of other government departments and offices.

In listening to the speakers at these retirement events, I was struck by the thought that the work of these two men—their legacies—will continue to benefit *thousands of people* who will receive state services for years to come. Part of the legacies that Joe and Dick leave behind extends to the imprint they have made, by their personal styles, professional friendships and mentoring, on others who remain in public service. Those "others" will continue to benefit still thousands more people.

Joe Odell was one of the first persons I met in late 1995 when I started as Deputy Commissioner in DMHAS. He did all sorts of prep work for me as I traveled around the state that first year. He also helped to write the first client placement criteria that have been the foundation of the highly successful DMHAS General Assistance Behavioral Healthcare Program for the last nine years. Care for 30,000 + persons per year is driven by these criteria. Joe also helped to set quality and service outcome measures included in the contracts of DMHAS-funded private providers.

The greatest highlights of Joe's career occurred when he joined the DMHAS Office of Multicultural Affairs. He contributed to some of DMHAS' innovative and nationally recognized cultural program initiatives, e.g., Amistad, Dame La Mano, Proyecto Nueva Vida. He was a key player in writing standards, policies and plans that have greatly contributed to a culturally informed healthcare environment for our diverse client population. He loved doing training and counseling on culture for senior managers, licensed clinicians and young folks—often students from minority communities hoping to be substance abuse counselors. Some of these graduates attended Joe's retirement party.

Dick Lynch's career began some 30+ years ago in a two or three person office and progressed to leadership of the Health unit which spans academic settings and at least five major state departments. The collective budgets of these "clients" exceed \$9 billion and involve over 2000 contracts whose "boiler plate" was crafted by Dick and his unit. He framed major healthcare policies and rulings over all these years and defended his clients in all of the usual legal actions that arise. He was a task master who, despite holding staff meetings on Friday afternoons, was highly respected. He created a "family" environment.

At the beginning of Dick's party, all lawyers in the audience who had ever worked in Dick's unit were invited to join him for a picture. There must have been 50 to 70 persons in the picture, including a mayor and others from all walks in the legal system.

The overall legacy of each of these public servants is awesome.

Joe and Dick... "About the same?" No! Our healthcare system and the people it serves will never be *the same* because of your legacies. We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. I know that there are many, many other DMHAS and private non-profit agency retirees who have also left their strong legacies. To all of them, and to Joe and Dick, thank you!

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