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— Jean Balgrosky



### A Decade-Plus Later, Back to Finish What She Started

**JEAN BALGROSKY** (M.P.H. '80) HAD ADVANCED TO CANDIDACY FOR HER Ph.D. at the UCLA School of Public Health in the early 1990s and had already begun writing up the results of her dissertation. But she was also serving as chief information officer for Holy Cross Health System and building a family. Work and family obligations became so demanding that Balgrosky couldn't find uninterrupted time to complete her scholarly work. So she decided to take a break, promising herself that she would one day finish.

True to her word, Balgrosky is back – more than a decade after leaving. She returned to the program with experience that few doctoral students could match: nearly 20 years as a chief information officer. Balgrosky began at Holy Cross at a time when the CIO title was only beginning to become prominent in health care organizations. She established and implemented IT strategies and information systems for an organization with annual revenues in excess of \$1.5 billion. In 1997 she left to become CIO for Scripps Health, taking an organization that had grown by merger and acquisition and building the IT architecture from the ground up. Her goals included designing and implementing an integrated electronic medical record.

By 2005, having completed what she had set out to do at Scripps, Balgrosky was ready to shift gears. With the support of her family, she contacted two of her former mentors, Drs. Jonathan Fielding and Paul Torrens, who both encouraged her to return. Dr. Jack Needleman, now at the school as an associate professor of health services, took Balgrosky under his wing and worked with her to determine where she might need refresher courses.

She will explore a new dissertation topic: Balgrosky's original, on the utilization of endoscopic technologies in the office-based setting under three different reimbursement scenarios, was on the cutting edge in the early 1990s, but now, she says, the question has been well addressed. But she has a new passion: IT and the electronic medical record. “It's important to study the difference the electronic medical record makes in health care – to find out its impact on clinical and organizational outcomes – as well as where the potential benefit is not being realized,” she says. “The Institute of Medicine has pointed out that there are far too many errors occurring in our hospitals, and institutions are struggling to fix that. As health care becomes more complex, we have an obligation to look at our processes and make sure we're connecting all the dots and integrating our processes so that we are providing the best possible care.”

Although she still gets plenty of calls from professionals who want to tap into her wealth of work experience, Balgrosky is now a full-time student. She has ideas about what she might want to pursue after she completes her dissertation, but no specific plans, other than to do some teaching and research. “I know I have a lot to share,” she says. “In helping to define the role of the CIO and the electronic medical record, I was able to be involved in a lot of groundbreaking work. Even though I hadn't finished my doctorate, I felt I was living out part of what a school wants from its Ph.D.'s, which is to develop new knowledge. Now I can take that knowledge and advance it through research and teaching.”