Preface to the fifth edition

Much has happened in the world and in the field of public health since the publication of the 4th edition of the *Oxford Textbook of Public Health*. Sudden acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) has come and gone, H5N1, H1N1 and the probability of new variant influenza strains are the emerging infectious diseases of greatest concern, the health gap between rich and poor countries and within many countries has widened, HIV continues to be a major problem despite the development of effective treatments and strategies to prevent mother-to-child transmission, wars continue to be waged causing massive loss and disruption of human life and displacement of people, violence and terrorism have increased, and the epidemics of obesity and asthma have intensified. Our inability to effectively meet disasters has been demonstrated with the tsunami devastating northern Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and southern Thailand (2004), although the rapid, effective response by the Chinese to the Sichuan earthquake (2008) gives evidence that our ability to respond to natural disasters is improving.

On the positive side, the World Health Organization and member states are in the process of developing international reporting systems for emerging diseases, we have made strides in preventing chronic diseases such as cancer and heart disease (although these diseases are already major causes of morbidity and mortality in low- and middle-income countries), polio has been eliminated in much of the world through effective new immunization strategies, and environmental pollution and global warming are now recognized as major problems and have attracted political concern—a major step in implementing effective solutions. Further, the burgeoning field of genomics holds promise of transforming both medicine and public health, but we must be concerned that it is applied to the improvement of the health of individuals and society and not used to discriminate against genetically vulnerable persons. Although private organizations have long contributed to public health, there has been a recent surge in private support of public health, particularly in the field of HIV/AIDS. While these contributions have had very positive effects on the health of people, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, they have also had unexpected impacts.

Public health continues to be a dynamic, exciting field which challenges creative thinking and demands implementation of innovative strategies. For the 5th edition of the Textbook, we have outlined the continuing and new public health problems and have recruited authors who are leaders in recognizing and addressing them. Although we have continued dividing the basic structure of the Textbook into three major topic areas, the scope of public health, the methods of public health, and the practice of public health, we have added chapters to reflect the growth and changes in the field since 2002 and the emergence of new public health strategies. Thus, we have added new chapters on management of public health disasters, collective violence including war, applications of genomics to the field of public health, gene-environment interactions, clinical epidemiology, private support of public health, and the global health agenda for the twenty-first century, among others. All other chapters have been updated, most of them by new leaders in their respective fields. Further, we have recruited public health professionals from all the major regions of the world, reflecting the global scope of public health and the textbook.

We hope that this 5th edition will contribute to the advancement of the field of public health through its presentation of the scope, concerns, strategies, and applications of the field. The Textbook is intended for public health researchers, practitioners, students of the field, and other health professionals who wish to understand the field and their opportunities for contributing to the health and well-being of the people of the world.

Roger Detels
Robert Beaglehole
Mary Ann Lansang
Martin Gulliford