

Joan Marks to Retire

by Deborah Hornstra, M.A.



The Health Advocacy Program recently announced the impending retirement of the program's director and founder, Joan Marks, at the close

of the current academic term. As Marks prepares to depart after 18 years at the program's helm, she wants to make one thing clear: "It's been a fabulous privilege to direct this program. It's a different, committed, caring, imaginative program."

Marks will also step down as director of the Human Genetics Program, which she has directed since 1972. A longtime resident of New York City, Marks is looking forward to spending less time in Bronxville and more in Manhattan. She'll also undoubtedly be enjoying her new grandchild (number 5).

It's a big change for the Health Advocacy Program, which has been under Marks' direction since its inception in 1981. A search committee has been established to find a new director, and Marks is convinced

the transition will be a smooth one. "The important thing," says Marks, "is that there be continuity, support for continuing the program from the College's new President (Michele Myers, the former President of Dennison College in Ohio, who is soon to succeed Alice Stone Ilchman). And we have that support: the commitment to the program has been made."

Marks recalls when the Health Advocacy Program started out, as an idea being considered by leaders in the field of hospital patient advocacy in her living room. Those friends included Ruth Ravich, Anne Cote and Norma Shaw Hogan. "We talked about whether patient advocacy was a viable profession," Marks remembers. "We talked about which disciplines would need to be included in the curriculum. We always wanted to make it broader than just patient representatives and ombudsmen."

Terry Mizrahi was brought on board early in the formative stages to teach Health Advocacy I, which she still does. Margaret Keller referred herself to teach health law (she had seen an article about the program in Science magazine). Marsha Hurst was also brought on early, and Marvin Frankel was already teaching in the Human Genetics program. This was the genesis of the Health Advocacy Program.

From the beginning the program attracted a small but select group of students.

"No one who graduates from this program is boring," says Marks emphatically. "We target people who are something different, and we get the most unusual students." Marks admits the program might be a bit bigger, but "we're interested in quality, not quantity. Our faculty have always considered the Health Advocacy students among their most exciting students."

As the Health Advocacy Program moves forward under new leadership, Marks is confident it will grow and evolve. "This program has enormous undeveloped potential. The new director will be a direct, dynamic, take-charge person. They will have a deep interest in health care, a deep commitment to the concept of patient advocacy, and good teaching skills. And most important, they will have ideas and energy and vision, which they will use to develop the program to meet the challenges of the future."

The Health Advocacy Program owes an enormous debt to Joan Marks. She had a unique concept: an educational model that would create voices for patients in the health care system. The important work being done all over the country by graduates of the Health Advocacy Program is her legacy.

Congratulations, Class of 1998

This academic year Sarah Lawrence will graduate five more patient advocates, and as usual the group is unusual, diverse, committed and innovative.

Adrienne Wilbrecht was living in Minnesota, fresh out of college with a major in public health and biology, when she found Sarah Lawrence College on the Internet on a History of Medicine chat line. By that fall, she was in New York, enrolled in the Health Advocacy Program. She was impressed by the many different experiences students bring to the program, and in the course of coping with a new city, she says, "I also learned to advocate for myself." Her principal interests are managed care and primary preventive care for women and adolescents. She is currently working in Florida in a well-woman program funded by Planned Parenthood, and as a Patient Representative in the Emergency Room of a local hospital.

Karen Crimmins, who had been both an elementary school teacher and a retail real estate consultant, saw a need for advo-

cacy when various family members became patients. When she read in the newspaper about Sarah Lawrence graduation and noticed "Health Advocacy" as a field of study, she changed careers. Out of school for a long time, she found being a graduate student "a great growing process. I learned so much from classmates, learned to accept myself and others. To understand and listen to others is a great tool for an advocate." Her field work included researching state regulations on Medicare for HMO's in the tri-state area, and she is particularly interested in changing the attitudes of legislators and public servants toward patients. She'd like to work in public policy and says, "This program has prepared me to look at things creatively, and my approach to a job is the same. While I'm looking, I'll be catching up with three years of dirty dishes."

Karen Wexler was an actress, but had thought about a career in health, and being a patient representative appealed to her. She has found that Health Advocacy "welcomes people from all walks of life and make a

place for them. I could focus on skills that I already had — from arts and literature — and discovered that these could work in another field." She is thrilled to have just been hired as a Patient Representative at Memorial Sloan-Kettering.

Also expecting to work as a hospital patient representative or as a health educator is **Marsha Einhorn**, a former teacher with eleven years experience in health care. Interested especially in patient/family education and clinical ethical issues, she believes her education at Sarah Lawrence "has given me a unique and valuable cluster of skills."

Rebecca Sullivan was a practicing advocate, but in a different field: she managed the careers of classical musicians and worked as a volunteer on the development staffs of several cultural institutions in New York City. As a health advocate, she's interested in creating access to quality services for vulnerable populations, such as women and children and the mentally ill, and in the promotion of rational public policies to achieve these