

SBU's public health director says health care is a right

Raymond Goldstein researched Three Mile Island, unhappy with Obamacare plan

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Raymond Goldstein appears as almost a caricature of a college professor as he sits behind a desk piled high with papers and books, his hair askew, shirt somewhat rumpled. Goldstein is the director and founder of the graduate program of public health at Stony Brook University. He came to Stony Brook in 2003 following a national search conducted by then-Vice President of Health Sciences and Dean of the School of Medicine, Dr. Norman Edelman.

Goldstein's interest in public health started early. Before earning a bachelor's degree in history and social science at Columbia University, he worked for 10 years in hospitals as a radiology technician. During these years he developed the belief that health care was a right, not a privilege. From Columbia, he went to Brown University for a master's degree in sociology, and then back to Columbia where he received his doctorate in public health.

While at Columbia the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island occurred. It isn't surprising this event got his attention, since he grew up not far away in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Three Mile Island became the subject of his

doctoral dissertation. He subsequently authored a book on the subject: "Demanding Democracy after Three Mile Island", published in 1991 by University of Florida Press. His belief in health care as a right is evident in his book that champions the public's right to information and a voice as to what environmental dangers their community is exposed to.

The popular belief is although the partial meltdown at Three Mile Island was very scary, the minimal radiation released did not cause human harm. Goldstein's research disagreed. He found there was significant psychological damage done to the nearby population. He describes this damage as demoralization. His opinion is the damage is similar to the psychological harm caused by the recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico to residents there.

"It makes people feel less secure about their surroundings," said Goldstein. "It damaged the people's vision of their life." As to the question of whether people were harmed by the radiation release, his response is, "We'll never know." He said there was no registry of people exposed to the radiation. As a result it is impossible to track cases and determine if there are important clusters of

disease that can be traced to the accident. The data that Goldstein collected were purchased by the federal government and were quoted in the government's official report.

After completing his doctorate at Columbia, Goldstein joined the faculty of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, then Clemson University in South Carolina where he was the chair of the department of community health, and finally director of research at West Virginia University before coming to Stony Brook. He reports that when he arrived at SBU, "There was nothing, no budget, no staff, no plan. There was only the desire on the part of the university to have a graduate program in public health."

Goldstein had to recruit staff, apply for funding and determine the structure and content of the program. The decision was made to form a small, high-quality program. Goldstein feels the decision to not be a diploma mill was responsible for the program achieving accreditation quickly.

Obamacare

Goldstein's belief that health care is a right, not a privilege, colors his opinion of the new health care law. He is concerned that President Obama tried to please too many people. Goldstein recalls, "When Lyndon

Johnson struggled to pass Medicare, he was famous for twisting arms to get what he wanted. Obama altered what he wanted in order to make everyone happy. The result is that we have a law that will not cover everybody, and a lot of money will be going unnecessarily to the insurance companies."

According to Goldstein, an important part of the new health care law is the formation of the accountable care organizations (ACOs), which he calls high accountability firms.

'He's a pushover.'
— KAREN GOLDSTEEN

"The high accountability firms are to be transparent about their indicators of performance," he explained. "Thus they will be comparable to other such firms so that the patients know what they are getting when they join. This is very different from what is going on now." The ACO is a partnership between doctors, or doctors and hospitals that are responsible for providing high-quality care in a financially efficient manner. Goldstein said hospitals on Long Island now are aggressively contracting with private practices anticipating the necessity to form these ACOs. As a result, he predicts the day of the independent private practitioner is ending.

Off duty

What does Goldstein do with his free time? His response was he doesn't have any. His wife

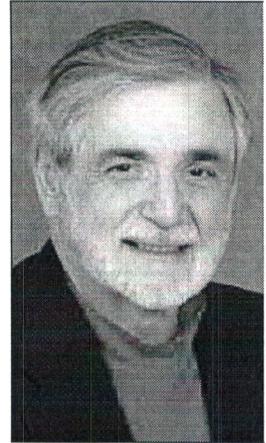


Photo from SBUMC
Raymond Goldstein

Karen, an associate professor in the program, reports he spends much of his free time with their children and grandchildren. He also enjoys spending time socializing with friends and discussing politics and other topics of interest, she said.

An informal survey of the departmental faculty revealed a bit about Goldstein as a boss. They variously described him as a "visionary;" "he is interested in the long-term results, not in the nuts and bolts;" and "he is very supportive of the professional development of the staff as well as the students."

When asked about her husband as a boss, Karen Goldstein summed it up differently: "He's a pushover."

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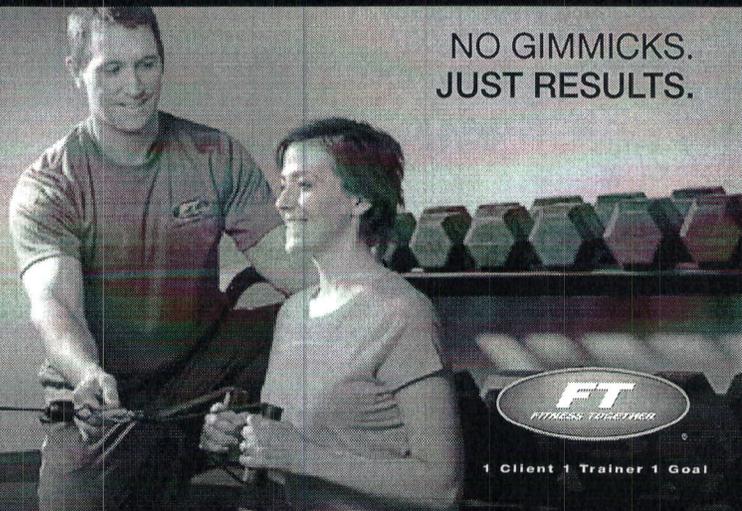
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