

## Helen Wallace, M.D., M.P.H.: Maternal and Child Health Teacher and Mentor

*For nearly two decades—stretching from the Kennedy era up until the dawn of the Reagan presidency—the UC Berkeley School of Public Health’s Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Program was led by **Helen Wallace**, who laid important groundwork and mentored generations of students. She joined the School in 1962 as professor and chair of the MCH Program and remained until 1980, when she moved to San Diego to head the Division of Maternal and Child Health at the Graduate School of Public Health at San Diego State University. She still resides in San Diego today.*

Wallace describes herself as a disciple of renowned child health expert **Martha May Elliott**. Throughout her career, she has followed Elliott’s advice to “look at what others are doing before you do it yourself.” Wallace learned from other maternal and child health programs around the country, asking them not only what they were doing presently, but what their future plans were.

She recalls her time at the School with great fondness, especially the support of former dean **Chuck Smith**. “He would go around the country, especially to Washington, D.C., to build partnerships with the state and federal government agencies,” she says. It was Smith who recruited Wallace to the School, along with four others: **Jacob Yerushalmy** (biostatistics), **Bill Griffiths** (health education), **Ruth Huenemann** (public health nutrition), and **Andie Knutson** (behavioral sciences).

Among Wallace’s accomplishments during her tenure as chair of the program was securing the School’s first maternal and child health training grant from the federal government, which made Berkeley the third school of public health in the nation to receive such a grant.

One of Wallace’s notable students was **Peter van Dyck** (see profile, p. 42), associate administrator for maternal and child health at the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. He remarks on Wallace’s “years of tireless advocacy for the field, and her tenacity in placing her students in high-level and meaningful leadership positions all over the world.”

“She convinced me I could make a difference working in MCH,” he says.



MCH faculty member **Nap Hosang** notes that Wallace “mentored young people during a critical time for women’s health issues in the United States.” Current MCH chair **Sylvia Guendelman** says of Wallace, “She helped place the Berkeley MCH Program among the top-ranking programs in the country, and she trained students who are today’s leaders in maternal and child health, both nationally and internationally.”

“She helped me—and others—realize that you could touch individuals in public health practice by implementing policies that touched individual people.”

Van Dyck recalls that soon after arriving at Berkeley, Wallace called him into her office and asked him what he wanted to do with his future, urging him to start thinking about it immediately. Van Dyck told Wallace he had been considering working in a city, county, or state MCH office.

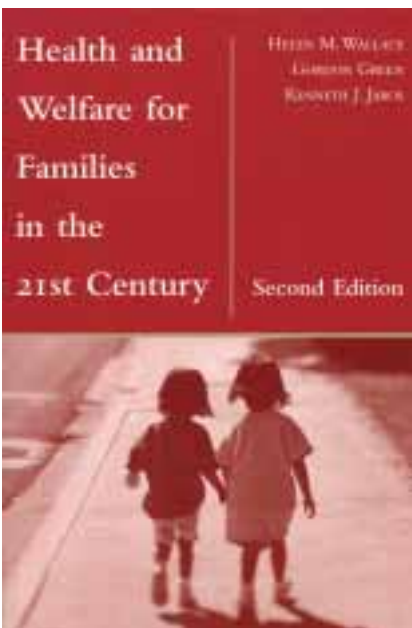
“Right then,” he says, “she hopped on the phone and started calling directors in places where she knew there might be openings. The words had just come out of my mouth and she was already calling people.” Van Dyck also remembers that when he began his first state job in Utah—a placement that Wallace helped him secure—she told him to visit three or four places along his way from Berkeley to Utah to meet with other MCH directors and find out how they do things. “And when she told you to do something,” he says, “you did it!”

Wallace received her bachelor’s degree from Wellesley College in 1933, her master’s in public health cum laude from the Harvard School of Public Health in 1943, and her medical degree from the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1937. She began her long and distinguished career working in the New York City Health Department as chief of the Maternity and Newborn Division and director of the Bureau for Handicapped Children. After 13 years in this position, she went

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Helen Wallace (left) talks with Professor Emeritus Chin Long Chiang.



to New York Medical College, where she was professor and head of the department of preventive medicine and public health. Following that, she was professor of maternal and child health at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health for three years before coming to UC Berkeley.

She is the author of 336 journal articles and 16 textbooks—most recently, *Health and Welfare for Families in the 21st Century*, the second edition of which was published in 2003. Besides serving as the national health chair of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Wallace was secretary of the

maternal and child health section and a member of the committee on child health of the American Public Health Association. She was, in addition, assistant editor of the *Journal of the American Women’s Medical Association*, as well as a diplomate of both the American Board of Pediatrics and the American Board of Preventive Medicine. She has consulted with the World Health Organization in many countries including Uganda, the Philippines, India, Turkey, Iran, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, and has trained numerous physicians in Africa and Asia. 🍷