Kimberly Switlick Prose ’99
Public Health Specialist

What year did you graduate from CSB? / What was your major? 1999/ Chemistry

Please fill in the blank to the following question, describing your work: In my current role, I vow to... be pragmatic in the policy and programming decisions made and transfer knowledge to build up and institutionalize human capacity development.

Why do you do the work you do?
I do it because I believe strongly in improving the quality of living and health status for people throughout the world.

What drives you? / Why are you passionate about this field?
I am driven by seeing inequities. In fact, as I write this, I am sitting in Delhi, where this morning in the paper there was a story about a woman who had gone to a hospital because she was in labor. The hospital denied her access to the hospital because she didn’t have a slip from a doctor and the money to pay for the delivery. She continued to deliver the baby on the outside doorstep of the hospital. Sadly, healthcare is inaccessible to many people, particularly the poor and marginalized, such as women. It is stories like this that drive me to do what I do.

Further driving my motives in this field is the fact that I have seen significant progress made when communities are empowered and engaged in policymaking and programming decisions. Good governance, such as community involvement, is critical to the success of any policy or program.

Describe a typical day at your job.
I have two typical days: one when I’m in the US and one when I am in the field.

When in the US, I do a lot of emailing, conference calling and meeting! State-side, I am focused on managing program work that is taking place in the field. This entails managing budgets and workplans, providing feedback and technical expertise to colleagues in the field, meeting with US-based clients to ensure work is meeting objectives, and responding to queries from counterparts, clients and colleagues.

When I’m in the field, I am more focused on providing technical support to program objectives and monitoring progress that is being made. This entails visiting field-based clients and counterparts, and meeting with program beneficiaries to see program/policy impact.

What was your path to get to your current position?
During my time at CSB/SJU, I was very involved in social justice organizations and tried to have...
as many international experiences as possible. After college, I spent a year volunteering in the West Bank and did some traveling in the Middle East. It was there that I gained a great appreciation for public policy and the impact that has on quality of living. So I returned to the US pursue a graduate degree in Public Health Policy at George Washington University in DC. I did my thesis work in Bangladesh looking at reproductive health policy and gender and health issues.

After graduate school, I worked for the World Bank and subsequently with BearingPoint, a consulting firm and one of the largest USAID contractors.

**What are some common misconceptions about your field or your job?**

I think that a lot of people sensationalize international development. By “sensationalize”, I mean that I think that a lot of people consider the significant amount of travel to be exciting and exotic, almost glamorous. Many times it is, but it’s also quite exhausting (jet lag), lonely (eating meals alone in hotels), and frustrating (spending a lot of time in airports and immigration lines). Further, there is a lot of politics in international development. There is substantial donor financing that originates from governments such as the US (USAID), UK (DFID), World Bank, etc. These institutions are highly political by nature, which has an effect on the types of programming and policy work that you can do.

**Can you share an example/story from your job that reinforces/illustrates the impact you are having?**

In India, we are providing assistance to the Government of Uttar Pradesh to develop a social health insurance program. We are in the beginning stages of the program, which is a pilot covering 100,000 urban slum dwellers. The program will create a social safety net for the poor for healthcare related expenses. Currently, people are at significant risk of falling into poverty or falling deeper into poverty because of healthcare expenses. This program provides a risk-pool so that healthcare costs are spread across all members of the program. Further, the program provides primary and preventative healthcare to meet the daily healthcare needs of this population group, who often foregoes seeking treatment or services because of cost.

**Why is it important for people to be involved in public policy or civic engagement?**

I think it’s important to understand and appreciate that we are all part of the same society and that our actions and behaviors not only affect us, but affect the whole environment in which we live.

Despite this, our world is fragmented between the “haves” and the “have-nots”; between the empowered and the disempowered.

Public policy and civic engagement allows us to advocate for our community, providing a voice to those that may not have one. It allows us to create an environment that is more equitable and one where people’s needs are met, regardless of discriminating factors, such as education, socio-economic status, gender, or in the case of India, caste.