

PREFACE

The unprecedented expansion of biomedical knowledge during recent decades has inevitably demanded an evaluation of curricula in the health-related professions. Consequently, the relatively stable period in medical education that prevailed during the middle third of this century was followed by experimentation with curricular content and the design of new strategies and resources for learning. One of the noteworthy features of this process was the active involvement of students, not only as experimental material but as critical monitors of experimental results.

Three main conclusions may be drawn at this stage from the curricular reforms of the recent past: 1) Experimentation and evaluation must continue, and flexibility must be built into the health-related professional curricula, anticipating not only the continued expansion of the biomedical sciences, but also the changes in the educational background of future student populations and in the needs of the health professions. 2) Students are capable of and motivated for independent learning. Appropriate learning resources must be developed for this purpose, and curricular structure must place the responsibility for much of the learning on the student to foster an attitude for continued independent learning beyond graduation. 3) Curricular content must not be defined by the sets of facts and skills on which the everyday practice of the profession relies. Unless the use of such facts and skills is based on a thorough and broad *understanding* of human biology, the practitioner will be restricted to the routine and conventional, degrading health care delivery from the professional to the trade level. Preparation for the practice of a *profession* demands education rather than mere training. *Education* is a protracted developmental process, resulting in a qualitative change in the learner's ability to integrate and use diverse types of information to handle not only routine but also novel and unfamiliar situations. In the process of education, the learner inevitably encounters many facts and concepts that will not surface in the everyday practice of the profession; yet, without such facts and concepts, an understanding of human biology could not be attained.