

# Foreword

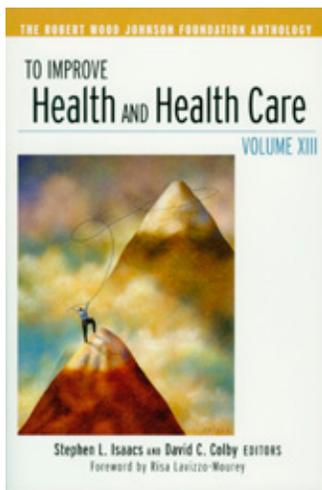
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Foundation

Foreword,  
excerpted from the Robert  
Wood Johnson Foundation  
Anthology:

**To Improve Health  
and Health Care  
Volume XII**



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Stephen L. Isaacs and  
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We dedicate this volume of the *Anthology* to the memory of two giants in the field who passed away in 2009

*Terrance Keenan (1924–2009)*

Compassionate leader, visionary grant maker, mentor to many and great friend

*Frank Karel (1935–2009)*

Preeminent thinker, who revolutionized philanthropic communications;  
gifted intellect and story teller; warm and gracious friend

Both men touched many lives. They shall be missed.

One of the challenges for any organization striving to be great is to look—systematically and objectively—into activities that it has undertaken, acknowledge those that did not meet expectations, and draw lessons from them for the future. This does not come easily to any organization; it is especially difficult for foundations. When I first became the president and chief executive officer of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, my predecessor, Steven Schroeder, reminded me that there are no external forces compelling foundations to examine their work and assess what worked and what didn't; the motivation has to be internal, to come from a desire to achieve excellence.

This volume of the *Anthology* features four chapters that take a hard look at programs that did not work out as planned. Three of the chapters examine why the programs did not meet our expectations and draw lessons for future Foundation programming. The fourth chapter is a commentary by Bob Hughes, a Foundation vice president and its chief learning officer. I draw four general lessons of my own from this section of the *Anthology*.

First, when we look back at programs that did not meet expectations, we must be reflective and respectful. We must recognize that no one ever sets out to have something fail and that everyone who works on a program comes at it with a sense of commitment to bringing about social change. We must honor and respect that commitment.

Second, we must be balanced in our approach, and understand gradations and nuance. I do not think that we could ever come up with a perfect project, nor find one that was a complete and utter failure. Most projects fall between these two extremes.

Third, the impact of programs may change over time. Initial success may fade with time or without intensive cultivation by Foundation staff. Failing programs, as Tony Proscio points out, may become successful after midcourse corrections. Some good ideas that are not widely adopted or are blocked by powerful forces become the great innovations of the next generation. Foundations such as ours have the unique privilege of being able to take the longer view.

Fourth, we must place programs in the context of the strategic goals and objectives set out in our impact framework. In examining programs that disappointed, we should consider them in the context of what we can learn about the effectiveness of our overall strategy. For that is what we are trying to do—to understand programs, both individually and collectively, and their level of success and place them in the context of what we can do to achieve social change in health and health care.

As a foundation, we are dedicated to learning from our past activities. Our Guiding Principles, which state: We must be objective, rigorous, and transparent in assessing grantees' progress and the results of their work; and we must commit ourselves to lifelong learning and continual improvement, reinforce an internal culture of improvement. We honor that commitment through our Grant Results Reports, our outside evaluations of national programs, our annual scorecard, and the publication of the *Anthology* series. The chapters on programs that did not work out as planned illustrate our commitment to learning and improvement. I hope that they will provide guidance not only to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation but to the field of philanthropy as well.