Steve Schoenbaum, moderator: Bio

Since Swarthmore:

After Swarthmore, I went to Harvard Medical School along with Suzanne Wright Fletcher, Arthur Siegel, and David Wegman. A year after graduating and internship in internal medicine at the University of Minnesota Hospitals, I, along with David, went to CDC and was assigned to stay at the Atlanta headquarters as the “acting chief” of the Respiratory Viral Surveillance Unit. In short, I was the only person assigned to track the epidemiology of influenza during the Hong Kong influenza pandemic in 1968-1969, an experience that has given me a unique perspective on Covid-19. Then I went back to Boston to complete residency, a fellowship in infectious diseases, and get a degree in public health. I got that degree so that I could learn more about epidemiologic methods and learn something about management and economics.

In 1981, I left the Brigham and Women’s Hospital and academic medicine to join a small but growing organization, Harvard Community Health Plan (HCHP), a pre-paid health plan that, at the time I joined was responsible for the health care of 100,000 members, and by 1999, when I left, was responsible for about 1.5 million. I joined HCHP because I realized that my interests were in providing increasingly better care to individuals and populations. At HCHP, I had multiple management roles and practiced general internal medicine part-time. In the late 1980s, I developed the idea for what became the Harvard Medical School Department of Ambulatory Care and Prevention. It became a reality in the early 1990s, and the chairman of that department recruited Suzanne and her husband, Bob Fletcher (also a medical school classmate), as key professors. Today it is called the Department of Population Medicine.

Starting in 1993, I was first medical director and then president of a pre-paid health plan based in Rhode Island that HCHP had taken over when it got into financial difficulty. For a variety of reasons, we never could fully resolve the financial problems, and it went out of business at the end of 1999. I was immediately offered a position in New York and became the Executive Vice President for Programs at the Commonwealth Fund, a grant-making organization where we developed several quality-of-care-related programs (for elderly, underserved, etc). The Fund’s strength was in funding and also doing health policy analyses. We did and funded many of the health services analyses that ended up as the research underlying the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or “Obamacare”).

I left the Fund at the end of 2010, after the ACA had been enacted; and I took a part-time position at the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, a small grant-making organization that supports improvements in health professions education, particularly medical and nursing education. I continue to do that and also volunteer as an associate editor of the Israel Journal of Health Policy Research, an online peer-reviewed publication, which, despite the name, has an international readership.