History

The official origin of the current DEB began in 1956 when preventive medicine achieved full departmental status in the School of Medicine at UCSF, with Salvatore Lucia MD serving as chair. Dr. Lucia had led a division of Preventive Medicine in the Department of Medicine for approximately 10 years prior to 1956. Earlier still, K. F. Meyer, M.D., Ph.D., director of the George William Hooper Foundation (1921-1958), established the importance of the study of infectious disease epidemiology for control of many of the diseases affecting Californians at the time. Under Lucia’s influence, the philosophic perspective and teaching in preventive medicine emphasized human ecology, including diverse factors – biological, sociological and geographical – that influence physical and psychological well being.

In 1966 the Department of Preventive Medicine was discontinued and responsibility for instruction in epidemiology was given to Ralph Audy, MD, Director of the G.W. Hooper Foundation and internationally known for his work in the epidemiology of scrub typhus and other tropical diseases. In the next decade the core curriculum in preventive medicine in most American medical schools moved from an emphasis on infectious disease to the problems of an aging population, mortality and morbidity from chronic diseases, and social and health policy issues. In 1978 these factors elevated Epidemiology and International Health to the status of Department in the School of Medicine, with Nicholas Petrakis, MD, as Chair. In 1983 the “Group in Biostatistics” became administratively affiliated with the Department of Epidemiology and International Health.

In 1989 Virginia Ernster, PhD, was appointed Department Chair and under her leadership the name was changed to Epidemiology & Biostatistics to recognize the emerging role of biostatistics as the quantitative basis for epidemiology and clinical research. During the 1980s, Stephen Hulley, MD, created the Clinical Epidemiology Program, which focused on diagnosis, prognosis, and therapeutic efficacy in patient populations, a departure from classical epidemiologic approaches to studying the distributions and determinants of disease in healthy populations.

In 1994, when Steve Hulley was appointed Chair of the Department, new programs were created in molecular epidemiology, international health, methods for longitudinal analysis and clinical epidemiology. In 2000 Charles McCulloch, PhD, became Head of the Division of Biostatistics.

In October 2006 Robert A. Hiatt, MD, PhD, and Neil Risch, PhD, were appointed as Co-Chairs of the Department and Bob Hiatt, was named the sole chair in 2010. The department has
continued to grow and expand the scope of its expertise since that time. A major accomplishment has been the approval and commencement of a new graduate program in Epidemiology & Translational Sciences, which promises to further expand the scope of departmental activities, to be a magnet for faculty and student recruitment and to take the department into its next stage of evolution.