I am very pleased and honored that Omar Khan asked me to assist him in developing this book, *Geographic Information Systems and Health Applications*. Omar and I developed and co-chaired the first two International Health Geographics Conferences in 1998 (Baltimore) and 2000 (Washington, DC). The nearly 500 attendees at those two conferences were exposed to tremendously exciting and informative applications of this relatively “new” technology—new at least in the health. I believe those conferences, as well as several others in recent years, provided many of the contributions to this book, or were the impetus for new work which you will read about here.

“Health Geographics” is a term that came into existence in the mid-1990s when I began to ask if anyone was using GIS technology in the areas of healthcare, health resources, health systems and health science. I was amazed at the number and variety people around the world who were doing truly innovative things, yet thinking they were in a very small minority. In fact, when I explored further and asked if there were any conferences that catered to this group of researchers, I found little happening. When I asked if there should be a ‘health geographics’ conference, many said yes, but an even surprising number sent me abstracts and asked “When?” and “Where?” I’m saying all this to illustrate that there has been a real need for conferences such as those, and books such as these. There will be many more of both as this powerful GIS technology is woven even deeper into the fabric of healthcare and related health disciplines.

As the first conferences unfolded, we saw many GIS applications focused on problems such as dengue fever, malaria, immunization programs, hospital catchment area mapping, managing habitats for Lyme disease, etc.—all very interesting and excellent uses of this technology. Health Geographics has matured greatly over the
past five years—and still has a lot more ground to cover. Now we’re seeing applications as mentioned before and in addition, Health Geographics professionals are turning up in cancer research, tracking human pathogens in drinking water supplies, and in some very interesting applications being discussed in hospital GIS circles.

This book presents a very limited overview of some of the ways GIS is being applied in health. I encourage you to read with an open mind, and challenge yourself and your colleagues to think outside the box.

One final comment: I would like to dedicate my efforts on this book especially to Greg and Carrie—they are the absolute pride of my life.

“Think Spatially – Decide Visually – Act Wisely – and Be Satisfied!”

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