Richard Southby ’67

When Richard Southby entered the Sloan Program, he was sure that he wanted to go into hospital administration. “My intention was to go back to Australia and become the administrator of a children’s hospital,” he said.

Then he met Professor Roger Battistella, who introduced him to the field of health policy. “He was the one that really changed my direction,” Southby said. “At that stage, back in the mid-1960s, it was really a growing field and one where I saw an opportunity to make a contribution.”

Southby went on to become one of the founders of the School of Public Health and Health Services at the George Washington University. He’s had an impact on the field across the globe and is passionate about reforming the U.S. health care system to focus more on public health.

“We spend far too much time debating where the money is coming from and going to and not nearly enough time talking about things individuals need to do to maintain their health,” he said. “It’s not the only answer, but it’s an aspect we’re missing out on, and therefore our health status is poorer and our costs are much higher.”

Besides shaping his career, the Sloan Program had another important impact on Southby’s life. While teaching in the annual Health Executives Development Program on the Cornell campus in the 1970s, he met his wife, Janet Rexrode, who at that time was completing her PhD in nursing. She continued her career as an Army nurse and retired in 1996 as chief nurse of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

“Cornell and Sloan had a very important impact in two aspects of my life, my career and my marriage,” he said.

Southby would like to see more health education for everyone from schoolchildren to senior citizens. “It starts from the beginning in the primary and secondary schools,” he said. “We also need realistic community education programs.”

The health care system also needs a new generation of leaders, he said.

“They need to have the kind of preparation that Sloan has given me and generations of other students. The basic core concepts are still relevant. We need to bring health services management, clinical medicine, and public health together, as partners and not competitors, working closely with communities. This will require health leaders with a clear vision and a strong commitment to making the necessary changes in every aspect of our health care system.”

“The Sloan Program introduced me to fields that I had not been aware of before—medical care organization and health policy. The basic concepts I learned then are still relevant today.”