

ODLAND, G.F.



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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April 29, 1980

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

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Dear Dr. Odland:

Thank you for your letter of February 22nd and for the report on Analysis of Research Needs and Priorities in Dermatology. I read this with great interest and am happy to respond to your request for comments.

This was certainly an illuminating and broad perspective on research accomplishments and opportunities in dermatology. I am sure that it is a landmark for the field and it stands high in relation to similar efforts that have been attempted in some of the other categorical areas.

I have to say that it likewise bears the earmarks of the usual mode of preparation, namely a committee attempting to refine a consensus of disparate interests. Recognizing that pressures of time may have predominated, I share some impressions with you about some of the limitations of the report. This is with the hope that these might be kept in mind in the event of some future reinitiation of a like effort.

Perhaps most wanting is an overall framework of skin biology, as the foundation on which other specialized perspectives would have to rest. Such a preface might consume a considerable fraction of the entire work; but without it there is a real loss of integration from dealing primarily with the diverse pathologies.

Another disparity of perspective, which is perhaps inevitable in a committee-based monograph is the contrast of the chapter on "prevalence, morbidity and cost," with the rest of the document. For example, the top two entries

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of Table 5 at page 398 are diseases of sebaceous glands and pilonidal cysts, respectively: these together account for a significant portion of the diagnoses, but as far as I could tell were mentioned nowhere else in the report. "Other cellulitis and abscess" is the remaining major diagnostic category and accounts for even more of the days of hospitalization for listed skin conditions: of course these present problems that are by no means unique to skin although an exploration of that very question, (the ways in which skin microbiology differs from that of other organs) would be of some fundamental interest. One may well object to such indices of appropriate attention; but the asserted rationale for more attention to dermatological research is precisely the health burden.

Finally, I note the total, and I assume intended, lack of reference to thermal injury, other than sunburn! This is, of course, consistent with the boundaries of dermatology as a medical specialty in the United States; there is an obvious incongruity about the exclusion of such an important health problem which does have roots in research on the skin that are at least comparable to those of the other areas represented.

In any event, these are all small points compared with the urgency of promoting research in this area. The connections of dermatology with basic cell biology are so self-evident that I hardly need to belabor them; and not only do I wish for success in this field but I will certainly lend my own efforts toward it.

Yours sincerely,



Joshua Lederberg

cc: Dr. Attallah Kappas
Dr. David Carter