

December 26, 1967

Mrs. Marjorie Guthrie
Dr. Stanley Jaeger
Committee to Combat Huntington's Disease Inc.
200 West 57th Street, Suite 1304
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mrs. Guthrie and Dr. Jaeger:

Thank you for your letter of October 22. The lateness of my reply is no reflection of my interest; instead, I was abroad for some time in the interval and this is the first chance I have had to catch up on my mail.

Quite reasonably, my rash prophecies about genetic intervention elicited questions from a number of people especially interested in Huntington's chorea. This led me to read a little more deeply into the literature on this disease than I had done before, and to be quite frank, I am astonished at the relatively little research now going on on fundamental aspects of this disease! I have been able to find only one paper that deals in any significant way with the biochemical aspects of it, and this seems like a rather minor lead to a very big problem.

With your best intentions and hardest work, I do not think you could accumulate the resources to support the research needed for a frontal attack against the disease. To be effective, such research must be integrated into many other aspects of medical investigation. This responsibility has been met by the federal government as the only possible way we can make significant progress. But federal support for medical research has been flagging in recent years.

The most effective way to deploy your energies and human concerns would be to lobby your congressman for more aggressive support for the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Mental Health for research along the lines I have indicated! Honest, individual letters to congressmen can have more impact than any amount of fancier propaganda!

Our own research at Stanford is not explicitly directed at Huntington's disease. We are, however, very much concerned with basic problems of joining genetic material from different sources together with the DNA of bacteria and viruses, and these techniques will have to be perfected to give substance to the specific proposals mentioned in my article. We are indeed strapped for funds too, but I would not want to come to you under any false pretences about the directness of our approach to the disease in which you are most interested. And I would still suggest that you put the weight of your efforts on Congress, so as to achieve the most leverage.

GUTHRIE / JAEGER
HUNTINGTON'S CHOREA
COMMITTEE

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If after hearing all this you might still feel inclined to discuss some financial support for our ~~own~~ particular programs, I will be happy to have the opportunity to send you more details. It would be difficult to overestimate how useful another ten or fifteen thousand dollars a year of supplementary support could be for the whole research program of our department. This is only a few percent of the total research budget here, but most of our support comes from federal grants and these are often encumbered with a good deal of frustrating red tape, so that I have to spend a disproportionate part of my time in reacting to minor emergencies.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics