

November 13, 1961

Mr. Rockwell Gray, Sr.  
Mr. Rockwell Gray, Jr.  
21 Central Avenue  
West Barrington, Rhode Island

Dear Sirs:

This is in reply to your letter of November 4 in which you comment on and raise some questions about the appropriations for the National Institutes of Health.

For each of the last several years Congress has appropriated substantial increases in the funds for the National Institutes of Health and each year there have been a few people who, like Mr. Toth in his recent article, charge that the funds cannot be properly spent. In my opinion these people have been very conclusively proven wrong. The funds have been spent and the most searching review of these expenditures has shown amazing little that any reasonable person could criticize. At least four congressional committees and the General Accounting Office have made extensive reviews of N.I.H. operations during these years. There are few government agencies whose operations have been more continuously and closely scrutinized and the scrutiny has turned up nothing of significance to prompt one to question "whether the money has been pumped into medical research too fast to be used soundly."

I think some people tend to be critical of the amounts of Federal funds made available for medical research because a few writers, like Mr. Toth make such a point of the huge percentage increase in recent years. Percentage figures can be very misleading. When you start at close to zero a modest increase will produce an enormous percentage figure. This is the case with Federal support of medical research. It was almost non-existent fifteen years ago. A little different picture is shown by percentages if one considers that Federal funds for medical research make up far less than 1% of the total Federal budget and but a small percentage of the \$9 billion of Federal funds spent for all types of research.

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Another factor in creating a false impression concerning these appropriations, and one which you mention in your letter, is that "it appears that Congress is intent upon giving the N.I.H. more money than it requests." What most people don't realize is that the officials of the N.I.H. are required by Budget Bureau regulation to support the formal budget that is sent to Congress and I know for a fact that there has been no budget sent to Congress in recent years that had not been substantially reduced from the amounts the Institute directors thought their programs should have. Even during hearings, when witnesses are technically freed from this restriction by being asked directly for their professional opinion regardless of the budget, there is understandable fear of offering testimony that varies much from the decision reached by their bureaucratic superiors--unless the witness happens to be about to retire. It is for this reason that we also get the opinions of private experts, eminent doctors and scientists in the various fields, before making the final decision on appropriations.

For years I have tried to push the medical research people into doing a better job of publicizing the results of their research, not only to the practitioner but also to the general public. I can't see how people could be critical of the expenditure of these funds if they knew the returns we have received since the Federal government has been doing something to stimulate and support medical research. I would like to recount just a few facts and figures concerning the advances we have made in recent years as a direct result of medical research, supported in whole or in part with Federal funds.

Between 1952 and 1959 the death rate from hypertensive heart disease declined 29%.

During the last 15 years deaths from acute rheumatic fever have been reduced over 80%. The same is true for influenza and tuberculosis, and diphtheria has almost been eliminated as a cause of death.

One of every three persons with cancer is saved today compared with one in four just a few years ago due in large part to the chemotherapy and other research programs of the National Cancer Institute. Through chemotherapy we now have five-year cures against three types of cancer. We had no such cures prior to the Institutes research program.

A striking example of a "pay-off" from research of the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness was the discovery of the cause of retrolental fibroplasia, the leading cause of blindness in infants prior to their discovery of its cause. It has been estimated that the cost of caring for the thousands of children blinded will be 100,000 times the cost of the research that gave us the means for its prevention. This is a burden of human misery and millions of dollars that future generations will be spared because we spent some money for research.

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These are but a few examples. There are hundreds more. These results do not come without research and research costs money. Precise mathematical calculation of the dollars and cents savings resulting from the expenditure of funds for medical research is obviously impossible, but there is sufficient evidence to convince me that the returns far exceed the expenditures. We are actually saving money by spending money in this field. However, in my opinion, all of the cost would have been worthwhile even if there were not this economic return. The alleviation of human suffering and misery and the fact that the average American today has six more years of life than he had 15 years ago more than justifies every cent we have spent.

I appreciate your having taken the time to write to me for this is a subject in which I have a very deep interest and I welcome the opportunity to explain the reasons for my views.

Sincerely yours,

John E. Fogarty, Chairman  
Labor-H. E. W. Subcommittee

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