What a Vitamin C/Cancer Study Proved

To the Editor:

An article in your Sept. 30 Week in Review section, "Vitamin C Fails as a Cancer Cure" (with reference to me in the first sentence), said that a controlled study of 150 Mayo Clinic patients with advanced cancer, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, had shown no evidence that large doses of vitamin C help.

This is indeed what was reported by the Mayo Clinic investigators. They themselves and The Times article do not point out, however, that the population of cancer patients investigated in the Mayo Clinic was so different from that investigated by my associate Dr. Ewan Cameron in Vale of Leven Hospital, Loch Lomondside, Scotland, that the results observed in the Mayo Clinic study cannot be considered to refute the results observed in the study in Scotland.

The chief investigator in the Mayo Clinic study wrote to me last year that he hoped to repeat Dr. Cameron's work as closely as possible. I then wrote to him, pointing out that cytotoxic chemotherapy damages the body's protective mechanisms to such an extent that subsequent treatment with vitamin C would not be expected to have much value, because vitamin C functions largely by potentiating these protective mechanisms.

I recommended strongly that only patients who had not received chemotherapy be used in the Mayo Clinic study. This recommendation, however, was ignored. Nearly all the patients in the Mayo Clinic trial had received courses of chemotherapy, whereas only 4 percent of those studied by Dr. Cameron had received chemotherapy.

The Vale of Leven study showed that large doses of vitamin C have great value for cancer patients who have not received chemotherapy. The Mayo Clinic study answers an important question in that it verifies that treatment with vitamin C is far less effective for patients whose immune systems have been damaged by courses of chemotherapy.

LINUS PAULING

Menlo Park, Calif., Oct. 24, 1979