

HARTFORD HOSPITAL

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06115

June 2, 1972

Ann Landers
c/o The Hartford Courant
285 Broad Street
Hartford, Connecticut

Dear Ann Landers:

I hope you will qualify to your readers your genetic advice to "Bored with Fairy Tales," as it was unsound, deceptively reassuring, and you employed inappropriate examples. It is empirical experience with large series of first cousin marriages that has led geneticists to estimate that on average each of us ("normal people") carries the equivalent of eight deleterious recessive genes. Each pregnancy of a first cousin mating is at a 5 - 10% risk of producing a retarded, deformed or otherwise hereditarily diseased child. While the couple may be willing to accept this risk it is not inconsiderable, and the ancient tabus of many societies are based on it. Moreover, recessive diseases (such as PKU, cystic fibrosis) typically occur in one or more siblings but are not expressed in their parents or other relatives and so the family history is usually not helpful in warning of danger. Of course, a family history of hereditary disease usually does increase the risk of that particular disease.

Hemophilia, which you cited, is a sex linked recessive disease which unaffected "carrier" women pass to half of their sons. Carriers are equally likely to produce hemophiliac sons by unrelated as by first cousin husbands.

Genetic counseling frequently involves consideration of several complex factors not at the fingertips of most physicians unless they have made a special point of it. Interested persons, including physicians, may locate an authority in their locale by consulting the Genetics Services International Directory available from The National Foundation - March of Dimes, 800 Second Avenue, New York City, 10017.

Sincerely yours,

William E. Clark, II, M.D.

William E. Clark, II, M.D.
Department of Pathology

WEC:bw

Please sign me - Physician in Hartford