

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER
HOUSTON, TEXAS

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DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY

December 20, 1955

Mr. William G. Reidy
Professional Staff Member
Comm. on Labor and Public Welfare
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Reidy:

Recently I learned that the Secretary of Defense has decided to drop from the Defense construction budget the funds requested for the new building for the Armed Forces Medical Library. This action characterizes the difficulties that have plagued the library for so many years and have prevented it from carrying out its function as a National Medical Library.

As was indicated in our Hoover Commission Report as well as in my article on the "Future of the Army Medical Library" these difficulties will continue so long as the library remains in its present irrational administrative status and without proper legal authorization to function as a National Library of Medicine. Over the past 10 years I have given this problem much thought and have become increasingly convinced that these difficulties can be solved only by higher authority and specifically by Congressional action. The Medical Departments of the Armed Forces have clearly demonstrated their inability to resolve the dilemma in which they find themselves on this matter, i. e., of controlling the operation of the library but of being unable to support and develop its proper function as a National Institution either on a military or a legislative basis. This problem is clearly reflected by the inability of the Armed Forces to obtain a new building for the library despite the fact that it has been obviously badly needed for over 30 years as well as to meet its responsibilities as a National Library of Medicine. It is further reflected in the letter dated October, 1955, to the Honorable Lister Hill from the Armed Forces expressing opposition to the enactment of S 2408 and S 2482, identical bills "to establish a national library of medicine." The essential basis for their opposition lies in the statement that the "Accomplishments of the library are a matter of pride to our military organization and give it prestige." To be sure some effort is made to rationalize the need of the library to military medicine in the statement that "its resources are used by military medical personnel in the conduct of day-to-day military medical programs throughout the world," but the fact remains (and of course this is omitted from the letter) that this constitutes only a small part of the library's activities. Its major and predominant function lies in the service

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it provides civilian medical science.

This letter, thus, points up the reason that the library has remained on "dead center" for so long and has been unable with the passage of time to meet the growing and now urgent need of a National Library of Medicine. On the one hand the Armed Forces have strongly opposed its transfer or release of its operation. On the other they have been unable to justify its operation as a National Medical Library on a military basis. As a consequence it has suffered badly from inadequate housing and its growth and development have been severely hampered. In my opinion this dilemma can be resolved only by courageous action of Congress.

In the drafting of a bill for establishment of a National Library of Medicine there are certain thoughts which I should like to have you consider. These are concerned with the objectives or mission of the library. Its basic purposes should be (1) to acquire such books, periodicals, films, recordings, prints, and other library materials which are pertinent to medicine; (2) to organize these materials for use through appropriate cataloguing and indexing; (3) to make these materials available through lending, photographic or other copying procedures and provision of reference assistance; and (4) to insure their preservation. One of the most important functions of a National Medical Library is concerned with bibliographic control of current medical literature by means of special indexes and regularly published compilations such as the Index-Catalogue, the Current List of Medical Literature, and the Quarterly Cumulative Index Medicus. As I have stated previously a prompt comprehensive index to current medical literature is of growing importance in this day of rapidly advancing scientific investigations. It is this activity of the library which can best serve medical science and research today.

Best wishes for a Happy Holiday Season.

Sincerely yours,



Michael E. De Bakey, M. D.
Chairman, Department of Surgery

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