

August 6, 2007

Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D.  
Director, National Institutes of Health  
National Institute of Health  
Building 1, Shannon Bldg., Rm. 126  
1 Center Dr., MSC 0148  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Zerhouni:

We were delighted to learn, via the June 8, 2007 NIH News press release, of the formation of an external working group to examine the NIH peer review process. The stated goal of this process, to maximize the effectiveness of NIH peer review, is a laudable objective that we share with you.

In reviewing the list of individual members of the external working group, we note that no committee member is engaged in epidemiologic research. Given your outstanding commitment to clinical and translational research, we hope that this is an oversight that can be corrected. You have been a visionary in leading the scientific community to strengthen the process of translating basic science findings into clinical and population practice. Your mission to maximize the scientific review process brings a needed dimension to strengthening the clinical and translational research enterprise, i.e. an opportunity to strengthen peer review in this area.

Epidemiologists have long been at the forefront of translational science, providing key findings that have turned cutting-edge discoveries into clinical reality. They bring a unique perspective to clinical and translational science with respect to design, data collection, and analysis expertise; privacy and human subjects' sensitivity; and science within a population-based context. The extramural and intramural portfolios of several NIH institutes reflect a commitment to epidemiology. The reviewers of clinical and translational scientific protocols are generally epidemiologists. As such, we strongly encourage you to add an epidemiologist to the external review working group. We would be happy to work with you in identifying an individual or individuals who could represent the epidemiologic community in this capacity. We would also encourage communication between the NIH Peer Review working group and the community of professional epidemiologists through our umbrella organization, the Joint Policy Committee (JPC), Societies of Epidemiology.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter.

Best regards,

Dr. Roberta B. Ness, Joint Policy Committee, Societies of Epidemiology

Dr. Michael Parkinson, American College of Preventive Medicine\*

Dr. Colin Soskolne, Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics

Dr. Bresnitz, Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists

Dr. Stanley H. Weiss, Epidemiology Section of the American Public Health Association

Prof. Jørn Olsen, International Epidemiological Association

Dr. Allen A. Mitchell, International Society for Pharmacoepidemiology

Dr. Ruth Etzel, Section on Epidemiology of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Dr. Dorothy Stephens, Society for the Analysis of African American Public Health Issues

Dr. Mary Haan, Society for Epidemiology Research

\*NOTE: This letter has been approved by the Leadership or the Board of each of the epidemiology organizations listed above

cc: Dr. Antonio Scarpa  
Dr. Norka Ruiz Bravo