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May 15, 2002

Ellie Ehrenfeld, Ph.D.
Director, Center of Scientific Review
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Dear Dr. Ehrenfeld:

This letter is intended as a follow up to your March 28th letter, written to me as Chair of the Policy Committee of the American College of Epidemiology. We much appreciated the clarification, and we are delighted that there is no plan to eliminate the existing three epidemiology study sections that include members with a broad range of expertise related to epidemiologic research projects. We are also delighted to hear that the Panel for Scientific Boundaries for Review recommended that study sections in the Social Science, Nursing and Epidemiology Methods (SNEM) IRG be excluded from the current reorganization.

However, your subsequent text was more concerning. You stated, "As initial plans for reorganization for other IRGs are proposed by their respective SSB Teams and posted on the web, it is apparent that some research communities believe that epidemiological science should be more integrated into other aspects of biomedical science and reviewed by people who know about the disease as well as epidemiology." We certainly agree that epidemiologic projects should be reviewed by people who know about the disease as well as the epidemiology. However, many epidemiologists are quite deeply knowledgeable about the diseases they study. Regardless, we would urge you to include in the epidemiology study sections people with that disease expertise, if need be on an ad hoc basis, rather than pull epidemiologic projects into study sections that do not know how to interpret epidemiologic scientific methods.

Further, examining the SSB Teams, it is not at all clear that such recommendations are being made with input from epidemiologists. Given the primary scientific methods here are epidemiologic in nature, it would seem unwise to recommend adjustments within the current structure of the IRG, even "small adjustments", without input from the scientific community most directly affected.

Thus, once again, we urge you either to leave the assignments to the epidemiology study sections as they now are or, if there are to be changes considered, could you please be certain that epidemiologists are an integral part of recommendations made for those changes.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

Brian L. Strom, M.D., M.P.H.

BLS/jss

Cc: Richard A. Kaslow, M.D., M.P.H.