



Department of Pathology,
University of Edinburgh,
Medical School,
Teviot Place,
EDINBURGH
EH8 9AG

2nd February 1979

Professor J. Lederberg,
Executive Head,
Department of Genetics,
School of Medicine,
Stanford University,
California 94305
U.S.A.

Dear Professor Lederberg,

I am sending you a copy of a reprint of the paper which we discussed the last time I saw you and which formed the basis of the Clowes Lecture I gave at Buffalo. I have been spending some time working with the honour students here in Edinburgh since I believe if we are to get anywhere in cancer the new generation of students should know the problems that arise and the difficulties in tackling this subject.

As you possibly know I edited a book with Dr. Carter on "The Scientific Foundations of Oncology" and the editors have asked us to do a short supplement bringing in about 12 new topics in cancer. In view of our discussion and the need to bring in new minds to bear on this difficult problem, I wonder if I could induce you to do an article, about 10 thousand words, which I would like to have entitled "A Molecular Genetist looks at the Cancer Problem", although you are free to choose your own title. I am absolutely convinced that we can only make an impact by bringing in new people who need not make cancer research their professional career but who have the scientific experience and the breadth of vision to look at this problem. This is the reason why I say in the article I enclose that we should have a series of departments, within a University, each dealing with one aspect of a specific cancer. The departmental group should be small, not more than 2-3 scientists with technical support and they should be funded for a limited period of 3-5 years. In this way we can bring together top class research workers in genetics, biology, chemistry and physics as well as in the clinical subjects to tackle a cancer problem in a properly organised scientific manner. This would allow new men and women to go into the cancer field from their own basic department. If they should fail to make an impact nothing much is lost since they have still a career ahead of them. All the time I was Director of the Cancer Institute in London I felt that good young people may make an early impact but when they run out of ideas there was no place for them to go.

I hope I can induce you to do this article because I think it is a challenge which I am sure could excite you. The more I look at the cancer problem the more I am convinced that further advances in cancer biology will only come in the wake of advancing technology, and it is men like yourself who are outside the cancer field who can achieve this or, by such an article, stimulate young scientists of the future to do so.

I/...

Professor Lederberg
Stanford University.

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I am hoping to visit David Glick in early October next year. We would like the article to be completed by then and whether or not you do the article I hope I may see you on that occasion.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom Symington".

Professor Sir Tom Symington

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