



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20315

MEDTL

IN REPLY REFER TO:

4 August 1969

Professor Joshua Lederberg
Stanford University School of Medicine
Department of Genetics
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Professor Lederberg:

This is in reply to your letter concerning New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison.

There is very little I can add to what you already know about the incident. Early this year this office received a number of inquiries concerning the case; in all our answers we regretted to indicate that we had no idea how medical records on Garrison could have been revealed to the press.

Army policies and regulations expressly forbid, with certain exceptions, that medical information on a patient be released without his permission. The directive in this regard is AR 345-20, "Release of Information and Records from Army Files." I have had reproduced for you the pertinent portions of the directive dealing with medical records.

Needless to say, The Surgeon General and members of his staff were distressed about the entire incident. If a patient cannot seek out medical care with the reasonable expectation that his communications with his physician and the physician's medical judgments and records of treatment remain a confidential matter, then the whole basis of medical practice is placed in jeopardy.

Because of the particular sensitivity of psychiatric case histories, we have for many years required that the detailed portion of such histories be separated from general medical records in our treatment facilities. This serves to restrict the sensitive or personal portion of such records for the use of psychiatric personnel only. If a diagnosis of a definite mental illness is established, this information will be included in the general medical record, but the more detailed records retained by the psychiatric clinics do not leave the local facility and are destroyed

MEDTL (4 Aug 69)
Professor Joshua Lederberg

when they no longer serve a useful purpose. Our medical officers and our administrative personnel receive specific instruction about the confidentiality of medical records, and I am reasonably certain that none of them would knowingly be party to releasing such information improperly.

You may be aware that after a specified period of time medical records no longer being utilized in active patient care are retired to a repository in St. Louis. This is the U.S. Army Administrative Center, Office of The Adjutant General, 9700 Page Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri 63132. At this facility the storage and security of these records are not the responsibility of The Surgeon General. However, all Department of the Army agencies having custody of personnel and medical files exercise extreme care to limit access to them to those persons and agencies specifically authorized.

We appreciate your interest and share your concern over the incident. I wish to assure you again that any unauthorized release of information from medical files is considered a clearly unwarranted invasion of individual privacy and, as such, is contrary to Army regulations.

Sincerely yours,



JOSEPH ISRAELOFF
LTC, MSC
Chief, Technical Liaison Office

Incl
As Stated