

August 8, 1963

Dr. R. Sargent Shriver  
The Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation  
Suite 306  
1413 K Street, N.W.  
Washington 5, D.C.

Dear Sarge,

We have been planning to prepare a formal report and will do so as soon as we can. I certainly regard this as one of my principal responsibilities in the Kennedy Laboratories and I hope you will let me know of any date we should plan on for such reports that would be most convenient for you. I had thought of October 1 to cover the period of the previous academic year (September 1).

In general, things are progressing well, as best they can until the new labs are constructed. We still have to wait for some formal clearances from NIH before the plans can go out to bid: They are just about ready for this. I will ask Lyle Cook to include a more authoritative report.

Guy McKann is working out very well indeed, in several roles including some very interesting research on sulfur-containing lipids which are important in congenital diseases of brain development, as well as the clinical work in mental retardation.

Our neurobiochemistry work is well under way, under our NIH grant. Dr. Shooter has started his work in London, for this year. Dr. Herbert Posner from NIH/St. Elizabeths on a visiting fellowship, is in charge of the laboratory here and has started fractionating the structural proteins of brain.

In another direction, we have worked out a very close relationship with George Tarjan at Pomona, and with the other California institutions on the analysis of statistics on the patients. We are developing a technique of rapid computer analysis of such data. It will illustrate the point if I mention that I am sending a programmer this week to Berkeley to put the basic file of the 1959 perinatal morbidity sample study on one reel of magnetic tape to take the place of 40,000 punch cards which is the only format they have so far been on. The substantive problem of greatest interest is to look for signs that might be useful in predicting mongolism; to do this we also need good control data on fertility of matched populations.

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I had mentioned some problems I had in getting useful information from the U.S. Census and other offices. Actually Census has proved to be most cooperative, constructive and knowledgeable. It is very expensive (like \$30,000 for specific tabulation) to get answers to new questions, but they have also furnished a 1/1000 population sample tape which we explore thoroughly while waiting for some NIH funds and before making any deeper commitments. The National Office of Vital Statistics is probably just as anxious to be helpful to outside research, but I have an impression they are just too overburdened to give much time for it and I have actually gotten very little out of them. I am rather shocked altogether how primitive the records on mental retardation are, even for most state institutions, but some progress is visible.

I am sorry not to have persuaded you about the medical student scholarship even though we are momentarily under less pressure on account of some new arrangements with NIH after about 25 exchanges of correspondence about these Stanford educational and medical research programs. In spite of your concern about students not permanently dedicating themselves to mental retardation, the scholarship would, at very little cost, have dramatized the field in a very worthwhile way. But I will accept your conclusion now as final.

I am quite delighted to be in touch with you; you are understandably a bit hard to get hold of yourself. Except for the first week in September, I plan to be available right here for the foreseeable future and would welcome an official visit, or an unofficial one, at any time.

I hope your query about my health is just good will and not some groundless rumor perhaps provoked by my having (purposefully and painfully) taken off unnecessary weight. Thank you for asking - I have never felt better but it would be better still if Mr. Kennedy and Congress and NIH and the other agencies could work out some sensible way to handle support of universities and research. This might let people like me think more about science and less about how to finance it which, if I may say so, takes an unreasonable part of my time.

With best wishes.

As ever,

Joshua Lederberg  
Director

JL:as