

March 28, 1972

Dr. J.H. Edwards
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Dear John,

It seems increasingly evident that I will not be able to be present myself at the National Academy of Sciences Symposium in April, that I was given the mission of organizing. I am particularly sorry not to have a chance to see you but I hope that you may be able to respond to another opportunity for that. Before I come to this, let me expand briefly on what I hope you will cover in your lecture, although of course you must assume your own responsibility for this. What I had in mind was a general perspective on the quantitative contribution of genetic components to the variance of health by whatever (necessarily imperfect) measures one knows how to apply. The role of single factor determined diseases, while of course most important in investigative work, tends to give gross underestimates of the role of genetic variation in general health levels. Most practitioners have therefore obviously grossly underestimated the overall significance of genetic factors. I realize that you will ask what one can do with this information except to try to isolate single gene pathways, and of course most of the conference will be devoted just to these. C.O. Carter has made a certain contribution in emphasizing the heritable component of common diseases, but I am not aware that anyone as yet has attempted a general overview of "the heritability of health" in a critical fashion as I believe you would be uniquely qualified to do and hope will be equally interested.

As to the chance for a further meeting let me most economically draw your attention to the attached statement and asked whether I can interest you in being a participant at the meeting at Rehovot this July. Most of the attendants will be more particularly concerned with biochemical and physiological aspects of genetics; we may have some small additional contribution of the cytological side and we are likely to be considerably deprived of population-oriented insights if I cannot persuade you to come. At the very least I think it will be good fun and there may even be a useful outcome from this kind of brainstorming workshop.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr

Edwards, J.H.