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June 5, 1974

Dr. Anne R. Somers  
Director  
Office of Consumer Health Education  
College of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey  
Rutgers Medical School  
P.O. Box 101  
Piscataway, New Jersey 08854

Dear Dr. Somers,

I have enjoyed reading your article in American Medical News for May 27th, as I have also admired your other writings. Your theme on the cost effectiveness of educating the consumer is one that I agree with and have stressed in my own teaching. However, I wonder if it is possible to give any empirical validation for the effectiveness of health education. I realize that you are yourself in a study concerned with the same end but perhaps you have collected some cogent literature that might be helpful to me in my teaching.

Much as I support a high priority for public health education, I wonder if you would really mean, as more than a metaphore, your comparison of a few million dollars versus billions as a measure of the relative utility of these inputs. (One can, of course, always point to a situation where the kingdom was lost for want of a nail). Then the setting of your article was perhaps not intended to evoke quite so precise a reading. But the one purpose of my writing to you is to ask for the present state of understanding of the economic pay-off of investment in health education. (I am particularly concerned that this subject has progressively deteriorated as a part of the curriculum in grade and secondary school education. But do not ask me to verify that intuition quantitatively!)

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr

SOMERS, Anne