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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

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NIH EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

March 25, 1996

Harold Varmus, M.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Varmus:

I am writing to you to address two issues of concern to me regarding the National Institutes of Health. I would like information on the matters addressed below prior to my Subcommittee's hearing on your budget, currently set for May 16th.

I appeared on the "America's Talking" network show "Pork," on March 13, 1996, on an episode which addressed a alternative medicine. Specifically, the commentator focused on an NIH clinical trial of two prescription drugs for the treatment of benign prostatic hypertrophy. I was told that the clinical trial will evaluate two prescription drugs, but will not include saw palmetto which Drs. Franklin Lowe and Julian Whitaker, both of whom were also guests on the broadcast, recommended as a powerful and safe remedy for BPH. Dr. Whitaker alleged that saw palmetto is not included in the clinical trial because the NIH is "hand in glove" with the pharmaceutical companies which manufacture the two drugs being tested in the clinical trial. Can you comment on that allegation? Can you explain why saw palmetto is not being included in the BPH treatment trial? Has the NIH tested saw palmetto as a treatment for BPH? Are alternative therapies incorporated into any of NIH's clinical trials?

The second issue I want to address is the enclosed Washington Post article from February 8, 1996, regarding the exchange of scientific information. The article summarizes the findings of Dr. Steven Rosenberg, of your staff, which were published in the New England Journal of Medicine. Can you see any way in which we can ensure or encourage the exchange of information for the advancement in medical research? How can we re-focus medical research to encourage collaboration and make medical results and not financial rewards the primary objective?

I appreciate your attention to these issues, and look forward to addressing them with you at the fiscal year 1997 budget hearing.

Sincerely,



Arlen Specter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
and Human Services, and Education

AS: ch
Enclosure