

Senators Support Behavioral Research at NIGMS

October 09, 2003

When NIH's National Institute of General Medical Sciences was created in 1962, Congress specifically mandated the institute to support basic behavioral science. Forty years later, the Institute commits no funds to such research.

For the past several years, in a recurring scenario reminiscent of the movie "Groundhog Day," in which the main character keeps reliving events, APS has raised this issue with Congress, Congress has asked NIGMS to establish a program in behavioral science research and training, and NIGMS has ignored Congress.

We're pleased to report that the scenario has changed, and that the Senate's leading supporters of NIH are vowing to work together to see that basic behavioral research is supported by NIGMS.

As Congress debated NIH's FY 04 budget, Senators Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI), Arlen Specter (R-PA), and Tom Harkin (D-IA) engaged in a planned, formal discussion known as a colloquy, designed to highlight the issue.

This colloquy, which is included in the September 10, 2003 Congressional Record, takes place in the context of FY 04 being the first fiscal year to follow five years of double digit increases in the budget of NIH, which resulted in the budget being nearly doubled. The budget for NIGMS stands at \$1.86 billion for FY 03, and this will only increase when Congress finishes work on the budget for FY 04.

Repeatedly, Congress has requested that NIGMS take up basic behavioral research and training as part of its portfolio, and repeatedly the institute has dismissed these requests. Both the Senate and House have used appropriations report language and other means to instruct NIGMS to hold true to its mission, to no avail. The colloquy between Senators Inouye, Specter, and Harkin notes this, as Senator Inouye referred to this issue as "largely unresolved."

Inouye, a long time supporter of NIH and behavioral research, initiated the exchange. He has a long history of being a champion of improving public health during his five decades in the Senate. As he notes in the colloquy, he is disturbed by the fact that this seemingly endless cycle between NIGMS and Congress remains unresolved. Citing the importance of behavior in health, Specter, chair of the appropriations subcommittee that oversees NIH funding, noted that Congressional efforts to double the NIH budget demonstrate a commitment to all types of health research, including behavior. Since it was September 10th, Specter took the opportunity to note the importance of behavior and psychology, relating it to the impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He called for a better understanding of the psychological effects of sustained stress, as well as the role behavioral sciences can play in the prevention and treatment of the leading causes of mortality and morbidity, such as violence, tobacco use, and dietary behavior. Senator Harkin, the ranking Democrat on the NIH subcommittee, also is a staunch supporter of NIH. He also commented on the critical significance behavioral research plays

in our nation, adding that their research has never been more important.

Past Resistance

As Congress debated the FY 04 budget for the NIH this spring and fall, APS once again made it a priority to alert Congress to the absence of behavioral science at NIGMS, known informally as NIH's "basic research institute." This is an institute that is mandated to support basic behavioral science among other areas, and possesses a budget of over \$1.8 billion. For the past five years, the US Senate has included in their appropriations report language an express desire to see NIGMS remedy this shortcoming; the House has also repeatedly expressed interest in this issue. Yet NIGMS has dismissed Congress' assessment. In its document justifying its 2003 budget request, NIGMS stated the following:

"The Institute's research training programs mirror the areas of science that fall within the mission of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences. Except for a few fields of inquiry, behavioral studies largely fall outside of the Institute's research mission, and are instead deemed to be within the missions of other institutes at the National Institutes of Health.

"The National Institute of Mental Health, as well as a number of others with missions focused on diseases, support both basic behavioral research and behavioral research in humans, since many disease states have behavioral dimensions."

When asked to explain by Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Judith Greenberg, the Institute's acting director, similarly wrote that:

"Except for a few fields of inquiry, behavioral studies largely fall outside of the Institute's research mission, and are instead deemed to be within the missions of other institutes at the National Institutes of Health, such as the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the National Institute on Aging, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and others."

Senator Inouye was not convinced. Responding to Greenberg, Inouye, referring to the section of the institute's authorizing statute that mandated NIGMS to study sciences that have implications for two or more institutes, wrote back: "There is a multitude of basic research in behavior that falls under your charter that would benefit from your support." Basic research in behavior is critical to the well being of the nation and contributes to better health and welfare on the same level as basic research in biology and biochemistry." The Senator's letter goes on to cite cognitive processing, behavioral genetics, and research on stress and allostatic load as ripe areas for the NIGMS portfolio.

Members of the House of Representatives have also taken a leadership role on this issue. Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Brian Baird (D-WA) himself a psychologist, have aggressively pursued NIGMS and their lack of interest in behavioral research, as well as their lack of interest in taking heed in what Congress has to say. The pair strongly supports a proposed plan for NIH to examine basic behavioral science at all institutes. However, the Representatives have bluntly informed NIH that this cannot be a substitute for establishing a program in basic behavioral research and

training at NIGMS. Look for updates on this issue in the *Observer* and on the APS Web site.

Senators Unite for Behavioral Research at NIGMS

This colloquy appears in the Congressional Record, September 10, 2003, Page S11332.

National Institute of General Medical Sciences Charge to Conduct Basic Behavioral Research

Mr. Inouye: Will the chairman of the subcommittee yield for a question?

Mr. Specter: I will be pleased to yield for a question from the Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. Inouye: First, I would like to compliment the chairman and the ranking member, Senator Harkin, for their leadership in developing an excellent bill for consideration by the Senate. As a member of the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Subcommittee for many years I understand the challenge faced by the subcommittee each year in developing a bill that adequately funds all the outstanding programs in the jurisdiction of this subcommittee. The chairman and the ranking member have done an admirable job and they set a fine example of working in a bipartisan manner to meet the health, education and workforces priorities of the Nation. I would also compliment the dedicated staff who support this effort. We would not have such good bills for the Nation without their counsel and hard work.

Mr. Chairman, I come to the floor today to highlight one NIH-related matter that despite our best efforts remains largely unresolved. This year again the Committee's report urges the National Institute of General Medical Sciences to fund basic behavioral research. The Committee report states the following:

“Behavioral Research – The Committee believes that NIGMS has a scientific mandate to support basic behavioral research because of the clear relevance of fundamental behavioral factors to a variety of diseases and health conditions. The Committee encourages the NIGMS to incorporate basic behavioral research as part of its portfolio, especially in the areas of cognition, behavioral neuroscience, behavioral genetics, psychophysiology, methodology and evaluation, and experimental psychology.”

This is excellent language. The Committee has had similar language in fiscal years 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003, but little has yet been done to implement the Committee's recommendation.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee's NIGMS report language from fiscal years 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 be printed in the record at the conclusion of our remarks.

The Presiding Officer: Without objection, it is so ordered. (See Excerpts from Senate Appropriations Reports FY 1999-2003)

Mr. Inouye: Mr. President, I also ask unanimous consent that the NIGMS statute, which states in Public

Law that one of the purposes of NIGMS is to conduct and support behavioral research, be printed in the record at the conclusion of our remarks.

The Presiding Officer: Without objection it is so ordered. (See Excerpts from NIGMS Authorizing Statute (Public Law 87-838 – Oct. 17, 1962)

Mr. Inouye: Would the chairman and ranking member join me in helping ensure that the NIH complies with the wishes of the subcommittee on this matter?

Mr. Specter: Mr. President, I thank my esteemed colleague, the Senator from Hawaii, for bringing this matter to our attention and I look forward to working with him and the NIH to resolve this matter. This subcommittee has successfully doubled the NIH budget over the last 5 years. Thus this speaks to this subcommittee's commitment to all types of scientific health research, including behavioral health.

Basic behavioral research is essential if we are to successfully address the many public health issues plaguing our Nation. Since September 11, 2001, the psychological and physiological effects of terrorism and stress became real to all Americans across this great Nation. It is imperative that we, as a nation, better understand the psychological effects of sustained stress and the role of the behavioral health sciences in the prevention and treatment of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality. The leading causes of death and chronic illness are related to high risk behaviors such as: unintentional injuries and violence, tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, dietary behaviors, sexual behaviors, and inactivity. I am committed to working with you and Senator Harkin to help ensure that NIH understands the wishes of this Subcommittee.

Mr. Harkin: Will the Chairman yield for a comment?

Mr. Specter: I yield to my distinguished colleague and ranking member of this subcommittee, the distinguished Senator from Iowa.

Mr. Harkin: I thank the Senator. Mr. President, I echo the sentiments of the Senator from Hawaii and the chairman of this subcommittee. The significance of behavioral health research has never been as important as it is now. The interrelationship between behavioral health research and the health of the people of this Nation is clear. I stand behind with our Chairman, the Senator from Pennsylvania, and the Senator from Hawaii to work with NIH to address the requests of this subcommittee.

Excerpts from Senate Appropriations Reports FY 1999-2003

FY 1999

Behavioral science research and training – The Committee encourages NIGMS to support basic research training as part of its mandate to support basic research training in all areas of health-related research. (S. Rept. 105-300)

FY 2000

Behavioral science research and training – The Committee is concerned that NIGMS does not support behavioral science research or training. As the only national institute specifically mandated to support

research not targeted to specific diseases or disorders, there is a range of basic behavioral research and training that NIGMS could be supporting. The Committee urges NIGMS, in consultation with the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences, to behavioral science research community and other national institutes and offices, to identify basic behavioral science research and training priorities and to develop a plan for implementing those priorities. (S. Rept. 106-166)

FY 2001

Behavioral science research and training – The Committee is concerned that NIGMS does not support behavioral science research training. As the only Institute mandated to support research not targeted to specific diseases or disorders, there is a range of basic behavioral research and training that NIGMS could be supporting. The Committee urges NIGMS, in consultation with the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences, to develop a plan for pursuing the most promising research topics in this area. (S. Rept. 106-293)

FY 2002

Behavioral science research and training – The Committee is concerned that NIGMS does not support behavioral science research training. As the only Institute mandated to support research not targeted to specific diseases or disorders, there is a range of basic behavioral research and training that NIGMS could be supporting. The Committee urges NIGMS, in consultation with the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences, to develop a plan for pursuing the most promising research topics in this area. (S. Rept. 107-84)

FY 2003

Behavioral science research and training – As the NIH institute most concerned with basic research, the NIGMS has provided leadership in basic research on physiological and biological structures and functions that may play roles in numerous health conditions. The Committee encourages the NIGMS to develop collaborations with other Institutes, such as the NCI and the NIMH, and the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research to fund basic research to integrate physiological knowledge of pre-disease pathways with behavioral studies. (S. Rept. 107-216)

Excerpts from NIGMS Authorizing Statute

(Public Law 87-838 – Oct. 17, 1962)

... Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That title IV of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C., ch. 6A, subch. III) is amended by adding at the end thereof the following new part.

Establishment of Institute of General Medical Sciences

SEC. 442. The Surgeon General is authorized, with the approval of the Secretary, to establish in the Public Health Service an institute for the conduct and support of research and research training in the general or basic medical sciences and related natural or behavioral sciences [emphasis added] which have significance for two or more other institutes, or are outside the general area of responsibility of any other institute, established under or by this Act.