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Mr. John Parascandola
Chief History of Medicine
National Library of Medicine
8600 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20894

Dear Mr. Parascandola:

I am very pleased to be notified of the conference to review the Regional Medical Programs against Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke. While I was not expected to participate in person, I thought it might be of interest to have before the conference some of my personal memoirs and opinions of activities of the first two years of the Advisory Council of R.M.P., while I served as a member appointed by President L.B. Johnson. I was President of the National Medical Association at that time.

There was wide national publicity and interest when the United States President Lyndon Johnson appointed a prestigious committee headed by Dr. Michael Debakey to study and recommend to the President and the Congress remedial comprehensive programs to attack the highest causes of death in the United States, Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke. When legislation was passed, the President designated N.I.H. to carry out the program and twelve members of an advisory council was named.

Eventually the original 11 men and 1 woman (Dr. Mary Bunting, President of Radcliffe College) took their seats around a long oval table at N.I.H. We were greeted by the Chairman, The Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service, Dr. William Stewart. He presented the Co-chairman, Dr. Robert Marston, who would serve as the very excellent official chairman throughout my two year tour of duty.

It should be mentioned that the years of R.M.P. occurred in a period of great transition in the nation. President Johnson was pushing his war on poverty. The great Civil Rights movement had just achieved the Civil Rights Act of 1964 amid much turmoil and challenges of the status quo in medical human rights.

Very few Black doctors were on the staffs of white hospitals in the north. None in the south. Northern medical schools had only token Black admissions. Black patients were treated mostly in public hospitals, in the several poorly funded Black hospitals or in segregated wards in white hospitals with inferior facilities.

I have included in this package news clippings and other evidence which further describe the tenor and state of affairs for Blacks and minorities in the struggle for equality of opportunities and quality medical care as RMP had its beginning. I was already considerably in the struggle so that my role with the Advisory Council of R.M.P. was cut out for me as I conceived it.

On the R.M.P. Council, I challenged grant applications from states and medical schools where there were known segregated and inferior facilities. After nearly a year Mary Bunting PhD, President of Radcliffe College was the first and only person to speak out in the council to support my challenges. During my second year, a distinguished pediatrician from Boston, at a coffee break whispered "Keep it up Dr. Berry there are many here around the table and professionals around the walls who agree with what you are saying. I can see it in their faces."

One of my most enjoyable sessions was a site visit to Durham, North Carolina, involving a multimillion dollar grant proposal which included the three medical schools of the state and the State Medical Society. The dean of Duke Medical School headed the project and spoke primarily for the grant. I was acting head of the site visit team because the State Director of Public Health of Maryland, of our team became suddenly ill. I still remember the apparent embarrassment of the Dean attempting to answer the question of whether or how many Black doctors were on the staffs and Society involved in the R.M.P. grant proposal. His answer was that all Qualified Negra doctors were either already in the project or would be accepted. I had already found out that there were none.

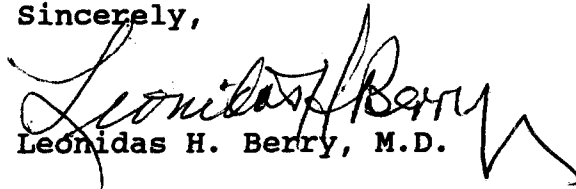
I had one open disagreement with Dr. Debakey during a Council session regarding a large financial grant application from S.C. I finally told him a joke at the coffee break. One or two years later, while we were jointly attending a N.M.A. meeting in Houston, Texas, Dr. Debakey invited me and I watched him perform a heart valve operation in his hospital. Near the end of my two year tour at R.M.P. a script was written by a Council member, Dr. Stephen Ackerman title "A Ballad in Honor of the Contributions of Dr. Leonidas Berry and Dr. Cornelius Treger member of the first Council of R.M.P." I also received a special scroll for services on the R.M.P. Advisory Council.

In 1968 I received a R.M.P. grant and carried out a study on esophageal and gastric cancer using fiberoptic endoscopes and including a period of post graduate teaching. Four (4) young gastroenterologists and gastroscopists assisted in the two year study. During this period and extending beyond, a comprehensive textbook titled "Gastrointestinal Pan-Endoscopy" was produced with international contributors. A copy of this book, now out of print is in the History of Medicine Archives of the National Library of Medicine. Credit for this entire production belongs to R.M.P. An essay describing the achievement of this grant is enclosed.

A great deal of progress in the entire field of medicine has been made since the establishment of the Regional Medical Programs twenty-five years ago. Much of this progress can be attributed directly to the stimulation and leadership of Regional Medical Programs of the National Institutes of Health. This can be glaringly observed in the area of Human Rights and improvement of opportunities for minorities and the underprivileged.

Thanks for this opportunity. Hopefully, the materials and my donated collection in the archives especially the textbook may be of interest to the conferees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leonidas H. Berry". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Leonidas H. Berry, M.D.