



March 14, 2008

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Director
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland

Dear Dr. Zerhouni

Based on your charge to the Council of Public Representatives (COPR) to help explore ways that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) can bring its message to a wider public, we are taking this opportunity to bring to your attention two high-priority communication initiatives that COPR believes are worthy of your consideration and support.

We recommend, as our highest priority, development of a multimedia national public awareness campaign to inform the public about how to access NIH health information. Our second recommendation is that NIH continue to aggressively pursue "new media" as a venue for bringing research-generated information and messages to a wider public audience. These two efforts could substantially increase the public's awareness of all NIH programs and use by the public of health information generated by NIH through its research programs. These programs will help to better engage the public with NIH.

We are aware that currently, each Institute and Center has its own public affairs staff. However, we suggest an agency-focused campaign that promotes all NIH research and information across all Institutes and Centers. Our intent is to support the communication efforts of each Institute and Center by engaging the public on a global basis with NIH rather than with any one NIH Institute.

The national multimedia campaign could be undertaken by the Ad Council or other similar professional marketing campaign organization. The Ad Council programs have been undertaken by various Federal agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services. As you know, these campaigns are developed in the public interest following extensive marketing research and preparation and are managed by some of the top firms in the nation. Professional campaign managers work with agency officials to refine and target the message through multiple and reinforcing forms of media over at least a 3-year time span. The process has an impressive reputation and track record.

Our second recommendation involves the use of Internet-based vehicles. While they may pose new challenges for the agency, they offer the potential to communicate health information directly to consumers. Millions of people each month use such vehicles as iPod downloads or YouTube Webcasts, and we encourage you and your staff to continue to move forward in exploring and expanding the use of such new media techniques.

We are happy to discuss these NIH-wide public awareness campaigns to promote the health information generated from NIH Institutes and Centers, and we offer the COPR's full support in exploring and implementing their use for enhanced public understanding and participation.

Sincerely,

The NIH Council of Public Representatives

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