

September 30, 1992
Silver Springs, MD

Dear Rick:

With respect to your question, there are two possible answers: 1) the workings of a creative genius defy description; 2) what paper? At my age, the second answer is the preferred choice.

Japanese Coronary Deaths

The fact is, I really have no recollection of the circumstances leading up to the [Japanese] paper. The first job I had in Washington was with Moryama in the mortality analysis section of the branch of the then Office of Vital Statistics. I remember vaguely I was looking for an analytical project after I went to work at the National Heart Institute, something that might lead to a publication. The question was, where I could get hold of some data to work with. Since vital statistics are in the public domain and since I was familiar with this source of material, the paper in question seemed like a good bet. Whether Felix Moore pointed me in that direction or I thought of it myself I can't say. It could be either or something else.

More to the point, it turned out that the paper initiated a growth industry which has produced a lot of interesting epidemiological information and continues to do so. From that point of view it really was a useful paper.

The HDL paper

In the same vein, the work on HDL has also proved seminal. What is interesting about that is the fact that it was a completely independent rediscovery of a fact that had been documented (and ignored) many years before. I still remember Glenn Bartsch expressing skepticism at the notion that HDL was in any way associated with CHD when I brought it up as a topic at a MRFIT meeting. That was the response to the original reports. Still, if we hadn't made the finding in the data of the Lipoprotein Phenotyping Study it would have been rediscovered sooner or later anyhow.

(There was, in fact, unbeknownst to me, a review article published about the same time on just that topic.) Curiously enough the paper most cited was the Framingham paper, perhaps because it was based on prospective data, perhaps because it was Framingham; but the really impressive set of data were those from the Lipoprotein Phenotyping Study. What is especially interesting is that the HDL cholesterol was of absolutely no interest for lipoprotein phenotyping [a la Fredericksen]; it was simply something you measured in order to determine the level of LDL cholesterol by the lab procedure we used. In short, it was an intermediate quantity and we only looked at it on the general principle that if we collected the data we ought to analyze it even if in a mindless fashion.

[ed. The rest of the letter is personal, having to do with deaths in his family.]

Best wishes, T [Tavia]