

Letter from William J. Zukel  
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Dear Henry:

What a delightful surprise to receive your book of memoirs covering your career of over 30 years. It is extremely well-written in the details recorded over this period. By coincidence we both joined the U.S. Public Health Service at about the same time. You may be interested in my summing up the parallel heart study experiences. I was recruited from a medical residency at Milton Wellesley Hospital in 1949 by Dr. Louis Robbins, who was assigned to Wade Giddings State Health Department to locate a suitable community to undertake a study of the prevalent types of heart disease and what might be done to improve prevention and treatment.

The city of Newton was situated for this study and the neighboring town of Framingham selected for a long-term epidemiological study. The Newton Heart Demonstration Program was carried out under the guidance of a six member cardiac program committee of physicians on the staff of the hospital (plus the health officer and Dr. Robbins). A fairly successful program was developed that included a popular monthly feature series for physicians by prominent Boston cardiologists, including Dr. Paul White's lead off [which provided sufficient local medical] support for the undertaking. Plans for new services that resulted included the following:

- \* A low-sodium diet education service for hypertension and congestive heart failure patients by the hospital dietitian and nutrition center nutritionists. The low sodium handbook allowing selection at 3 levels of sodium by the physician was developed and became so popular that several thousand copies were sold to hospitals and health departments outside of Newton.

- \* A penicillin prophylaxis program for prevention of recurrent rheumatic fever was established with an authoritative schedule provided by T. Duckett Jones and Dr. Mobell.

- \* A model hospital laboratory service of prothombin monitoring of post-myocardial patients placed on anticoagulant therapy with dicumerol (now coumadin) was established following special training of experienced laboratory technicians by Dr. Irving Wright's laboratory.

- \* Case finding of patients with elevated blood pressure among employees at Newton industries was carried out with reporting to the person's private physician to determine whether or not referral was warranted.

The bonus of the Newton experience was to have staff meetings with Roy

Dawber beginning in 1950 in Framingham. This provided an insight into the design and conduct of a population-based epidemiological study. The 20-year time frame for such a venture seemed daunting and stimulated thoughts of alternative ways to shorten the time scale in future studies. In 1951 I was transferred to Washington to the Heart Disease Control Program which allowed the opportunity to participate in staff meetings of C.J. VanSlyke at the National Heart Institute since he was interested in the field studies. He obtained agreement from the Bureau of State Services to transfer Framingham to the Heart Institute.

I was also able to attend meetings of the National Advisory Heart Council which was a great experience. Surgeon General Scheele and Dr. Van Slyke presided at its opening and Dr. White as Executive Director conducted discussions on how to implement the mandate of the National Heart Act “to conduct and support investigations into the causes, diagnosis and treatment of the heart diseases.” The Council had an impressive membership, including Dr. Irvine Page, T. Duckett Jones, Coke Andrus, Henry Marvin, Irving Wright, and Hugh Morgan. Future opportunities looked exciting for the cardiovascular field. I saw that I needed a stronger background of training in cardiology, and submitted my resignation to the Public Health Service to take the one year’s graduate cardiovascular training course of Drs. White, Bland and Sprague at Massachusetts General Hospital. To my surprise, Dr. VanSlyke called me into his office and offered to sponsor the training with the expectation that I would stay in the U.S. Public Health Service.

Following the training course, I had another interesting two years assigned to Dr. Hilleboe’s state health department in New York State, half time with Joe Doyle at the Albany Cardiovascular Health Center. Returning to Washington in 1957, Jim Watt offered me the position of Assistant Director in his office. After another diversion in the Office of the Surgeon General, I returned to attend the expanded epidemiology and biometry in 1966.

I inherited a great biometrics research grant staff under Harold Dorn and Jerry Cornfield. Jerry, Fred Ederer, and Max Halperin then became involved in the Diet-Heart Study and the Coronary Drug Project. Tavia Gordon, Harold Kahn, and Jean Truett became involved in Framingham and Honolulu and Puerto Rico studies. Roy Dawber and Bill Kannel helped in establishing clinical and laboratory comparability for the Yugoslavia Study and the Puerto Rico Heart Health Project with Maria Garcia Palmieri. Harold Kahn accepted an assignment to help set up the data collection procedures for the Israel Ischemia Study with Professor Groen, Jack Medalie, Henry Neufeld, and Uri Goldbourt.

All of these collaborative studies depended on maintaining good working relationships with the involved investigators. Fortunately, this was

largely possible because of the keen interest of the investigators in accomplishing the scientific goals of each study.

I agree that these projects in which we participated in addition to those of other investigators over the years have achieved remarkable success in landing causes of coronary heart disease and demonstrating reduction in the mortality by reduction of hypertension, elevated cholesterol and cigarette smoking. A marked reduction in mortality from coronary heart disease and stroke over the last 35 years provides dramatic evidence of the success of all this effort.

Henry, you can feel great satisfaction in investigations of the Seven Countries project and other contributions ( the Minnesota Code) brought to epidemiological studies and clinical trials. Thanks again for sending me an interesting book.

I can say that I have enjoyed our many professional associations and friendship over the years.

With warm personal regards,

Bill Zukel