

October 14, 1971

Dr. F. J. Ingelfinger, Editor
The New England Journal of Medicine
10 Shattuck Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Dear Dr. Ingelfinger:

I am pleased to be invited to join your idea of a popularized discussion of controversies in medicine.

I have previously "won" such a public debate, in which I assembled a powerful argument that carried the day--not because of the truth or the weight of the evidence. The reaction was so distasteful (we have a very human "American" tendency to associate forever the debater with his argument), that I refused its publication and still regard the "Controversies" of congresses as not-so-pure entertainment. I have since wondered whether this sort of advocacy system is healthy in medical education.

I get the impression from the style of the title assigned me and the absence of an exchange of manuscripts, that I would be falling into the same trap. I hope that you and Dick Ebert will excuse me from the temptation.

Controversies exist because of inadequate evidence, inadequate weighing of the evidence, or inadequate communication. I am sure that more evidence, and careful weighing of the evidence, is needed on this question of exercise in coronary patients, before strong opinions should be held.

I am not entirely closed to the idea, because of its eminent sponsorship, and admit to an over-reaction due to previous trauma (being accused of "talking out of both sides of your mouth")†. Consequently I will contact Dick Ebert on my return to the U.S. in two weeks.

Many thanks.

Cordially,

Henry Blackburn, M.D.
Professor

HB/rs

c.c. Prof. R. Ebert

Dictated from Prague