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CARDIOPULMONARY LABORATORY

December 9, 1975

Henry W. Blackburn, Jr., M.D. Professor of Medicine Department of Medicine University of Minnesota Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Dear Doctor Blackburn:

I want to congratulate you and your associates for preparing the excellent supplement to Circulation entitled, "Sudden Coronary Death Outside Hospital". I have also greatly appreciated receiving some of your previous reprints.

One suggestion is offered, since a considerable portion of the early discussion of this supplement was devoted to the declining coronary mortality. Most of the participants of this discussion were still proclaiming an "epidemic increase in coronary mortality" when Bob Moser's editorial and my article pointing out the decline in coronary mortality appeared in the March 4, 1974 issue of the JAMA. We were the first to point out the decline in coronary mortality in the United States in the medical literature and the Index Medicus. Joan Klebba's excellent Public Health Service pamphlet, "Mortality Trends for Leading Causes of Death United States-1950-69" appeared later. Her publication was cited in some of your authors' references. The decline had been going on for ten years and the facts had been readily available for several years before Ms. Klebba's publication. Our paper preceded hers and was derived from previously-available statistics. I believe the first decline in coronary mortality was reported in the January 1965 Statistical Bulletin of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company for their ordinary policyholders in 1964. Both their and subsequent figures from the National Center for Health Statistics indicate a general progressive decline in age adjusted and age specific coronary mortality since 1963. I brought this to the attention of Jerry Stamler four to five years ago and to the last three to four presidents of the American Heart Association. Dr. Ross was the first to recognize its validity and quoted me several times in 1973.

Five years ago it was pointed out to the American Heart Association that declining coronary mortality made their 'MAN ON THE SPOT' poster false and misleading. They did not agree completely but did agree to withdraw it.

The article in your symposium, "Changes in Life Expectancy Since 1900", by Manning Feinleib, would have been enhanced had he been aware of, and pointed out, the published facts that starting in 1970 there had been four consecutive all-time life expectancy records in the United States, and the increased life expectancy from 1970 to 1973 exceeded the increase from 1960 to 1970. The 1974 figures weren't available at the time of your symposium, but the overall increased life expectancy from 1970-74 approximates or exceeds the increase from 1950-1970!

The discussion of whether the decline in coronary mortality was largely due to improved treatment or prevention of coronary disease would have been more meaningful if someone on your panel had known of the published data that hospital admissions for heart attacks have recently declined significantly in the United States; e.g. for age 45 to 64 years there was a 16 per cent decline from 1968 to 1971. 1,2

It is hoped that future panels will include individuals with more current and relevant information. New knowledge, new ideas, and new insights are the justification for such publications.

Sincerely yours,

Weldon J. Walker, M.D., Director

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Enclosures: (3)

## References

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