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February 23, 1987

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Dear Geoff:

I was pleased to receive a copy of your thoughtful Feb. 3rd note to Arno. Your raising of a real concern about carbohydrates is a new issue for me and for the committee. I have been involved in studies around the world for 25 years in which good cardiovascular experience, good general health and good survival has been associated with predominantly a carbohydrate intake. This is also true of humankind, pre-agriculture. I was unaware of "animal and biological models relating carbohydrates to colon cancer". I wonder if rather than just raising the issue, you need to be more closely involved in the review and conclusions of the chapters treating diet and cancer. It may be that those parts of chapters on fats and carbohydrates need reworking in evaluation of the evidence and conclusions and whether the animal and biological model is important enough to override much human data in this regard.

I'm sure your point about stomach cancer is equally well or better documented than colon cancer. But not having reviewed the evidence myself, I would be inclined to relate this to confounders in countries that have high carbohydrate diets (high salt, smoked, pickled and smoked foods, etc.). I profess ignorance in regard to the nitrite issue in breads. I have always assumed that the contribution of preserved meats was far and away a greater exposure than breads.

Finally, I don't quite understand the logic of recommending a reduction in "fat intake without compensating by increasing calories from other sources". Isn't that really pulling the wool over people's eyes, as we're certainly not recommending that more calories come from fats and there is only a limited contribution that can come possibly from increased proteins. Does not this simply avoid the issue that you indicate we should address?

It seems to me that the discussion on this needs to come up again at the level of the cancer investigators before it comes to our final consideration.

I go along with your idea about the quantitative restriction we have made on

protein intake, and agree with your idea to remove that specific recommendation.

I very much like your comments about the nonspecificity of present recommendations in regard to vegetables, fruits, and cereals. They are, in fact, quite different. It is the professional nutritionists-dieticians that have put these into one food category, rather than we. Again, I suggest that these issues be addressed specifically in the diet cancer chapters by those responsible and come out with new conclusions and recommendations if indicated.

I am quite sure there is very little direct evidence about fruit intake, but why would not ascorbic acid-containing fruits have a potentially beneficial effect rather than "no harmful effect"? Your suggestion of a "nul recommendation about cereal" is baffling to me in our general desire to enhance an eating pattern of vegetable protein, complex carbohydrates and fiber, to resemble the "natural diets" we consider more healthful (Mediterranean, Oriental and some aspects of pre-agricultural diets).

I am puzzled by considering a recommendation of increased fruit intake as being comparable to a recommendation of supplementation by vitamin C. We're talking about an eating pattern and a lifestyle, one which focuses on a preponderance of vegetables, cereals, fruits, with smaller quantities of meats. This has been observed to be the most salubrious, in the Mediterranean and the Orient, where it is not distorted with traditions of high sodium intake and perhaps too low protein intake (Japan). We're recommending an eating pattern as well as specific nutrients. We're recommending a lifestyle that involves natural foods rather than a pill-popping culture. Though I fully support your concern about our rationale about fruits, vegetables, cereals, vitamins and minerals, I am puzzled by an "unnatural" approach to such issues. In terms of lifestyle and a desire not to suppress the market economy of food and agriculture, the idea that supplementation is as valuable or appropriate as eating natural fruits and their juices puzzles me.

I totally agree with you that the committee's recommendations "do not in fact fully follow the guidelines given in Chapter 4". It should be a concern of our leadership that we did not have those recommendations early. But it is of much greater concern that we have had those recommendations and full discussions of them for many months, yet it is apparent that few in charge of chapter writing and drawing the final conclusions and recommendations have been aware of, or used those guidelines.

I fully support you in the idea that we as a committee have to give a lot more thought and "substantial effort to the specific formulation of recommendations". The central NRC staff is behaving "as they have to behave", in regard to our sponsors, i.e., that the report is "on target". I think they recognize privately, as we now recognize collectively, I hope, that we are "not there" in terms of full and needed consideration of the conclusions and discussion of recommendations. I regard what we have little more than a fair draft. Having participated in many such committees, what I'm particularly concerned about, and have expressed in letters to Drs. Howson and Palmer, is the process we continue to use to get things in order, in other words, huge meetings and ponderous reviews of writings and recommendations rather than small groups focusing on problem issues. This seems to go on, ad infinitum. I guess I would expect that more of us will be sending letters of the nature of yours, as things move along without the needed attention and hard-hitting discussion and decision-making necessary among a small group of the leadership.