



**PRITIKIN  
LONGEVITY CENTER**

1910 Ocean Front Walk / Santa Monica, California 90405 / 213-450-5433

STEVEN M. ZIFFERBLATT, Ph.D., Associate Director

*file correct  
(Zifferblatt)*

September 11, 1981

Henry Blackburn, M.D.  
Multiple Risk Factor Intervention  
Trial Clinical Center  
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School of Public Health  
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Dear Henry:

I have read your lead article on "The Pritikin Diet" in "Stadium Heart Line." You have charged, Henry, because the article reflects a degree of anger and hostility that is quite subjective and totally out of proportion to the substance of the issue; the effects of a Pritikin-type diet and exercise regimen (you don't mention this) for the prevention and treatment of heart disease. Moreover, you chose to air your personal feelings in a private lay communication not open to public discourse. This can lead to confusion amongst MRFIT subjects trying to adhere to a regimen (PEP), similar to ours, that reduces their risk factors.

I suggest that you engaged in a deliberate character assassination, without having full knowledge of all circumstances and fact, and that you did this in a private newsletter to lay people unable to objectively judge the merit of your arguments.

I also suggest that what you have done is more offensive in manner than what you accuse Nathan Pritikin of doing (Nathan expresses his opinions in public and in a media environment responsive to alternative opinions).

I also suggest that you have misrepresented "consensus of opinion" amongst your colleagues at the Laboratory. We have

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spoken to several of them since Nathan has been to the Laboratory and your comments are far from an accurate representation of the reaction to Nathan's discussion amongst your colleagues.

Why you have done this, Henry, I do not know. But, for a person who prides himself on objectivity and adherence to the rigors of scientific discipline, it is ironic that you have mobilized your emotional and subjective personal resources against a diet and exercise regimen that has contributed significantly to increasing the health consciousness of the public with respect to dietary intake of fat, cholesterol, salt, sugar, calories and regular moderate exercise. Perhaps you do not like his style; that is your privilege. But, you cannot argue against the impact, empirically, that the Pritikin diet and exercise regimen has had on the American public - it is incommensurate with the degree of hostility that you exhibit and you have, figuratively, "thrown the baby out with the bath."

I recall a telegram to Senator Kennedy, sent jointly by you, Jack and Mickey Stunkard calling for a national cholesterol education effort. I recall Jerry Stamler's recent "Task Force on Arteriosclerosis" recommendation for a National High Cholesterol Education Program and other efforts by you, Jack and Jerry to promote a diet and exercise regimen that is closer to the Pritikin regimen than it is to the current American regimen. Of course, nothing was done by NHLBI regarding these and many other efforts (in part, this was the reason I left NHLBI). You accepted such outrageous, subjective, unscientific and decidedly political reaction to your recommendations and your colleague's recommendations in a much more subdued and social manner than the reaction you displayed to Nathan Pritikin's prevention efforts. Nathan reacts quite differently to such public policy decisions and you severely chastised him publically for such actions. Given what you and I know regarding the politics and economics of scientific research, his response may be different than yours, but, it is a logical, rational and effective alternative.

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I suggest you channel some of your emotional and scientific energy into making sure that your "colleagues" at the American Heart Association never again engage in a cooperative campaign "to improve the physical fitness of Americans" with "Bob's Big Boy Restaurants" through building in-store traffic and encouraging Americans to buy gift certificates for their friends. I am enclosing the appropriate materials. Contrary to your characterization, Nathan and I publically refrain from mentioning this ridiculous situation out of respect for the many scientists, such as yourself, that support AHA goals working to save American lives.

Nathan and I do feel that many people, scientists, educators and communicators, in their different ways, contribute to gradual change in the key medical, scientific, governmental and non-profit institutions instrumental in preventing and treating the major killers in our society. And we, in our own way, with our unique capabilities, have made documented and measurable contributions and will continue to do so.

We are publishing, Henry, and under separate cover I will send you some examples of published work and manuscripts submitted for publication. We welcome cooperative efforts and the American Health Foundation, Kaiser Permanente of San Diego and the University of California, Irvine are now working with us. We have a residential diet and exercise regimen and educational and motivational curricula unsurpassed in this country. We have collected data on the clinical effects of this regimen that is invaluable to current efforts for the prevention and treatment of degenerative disease.

We are not a medical center, now can we afford the many research-oriented professionals dedicated to conducting high quality research or writing proposals to fund them. We would welcome having the competence and expertise of your laboratory applied to the data results from our clinical and behavioral expertise. We cannot do, nor should we be expected to do, what you do so well.

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There is so much to do, it's tragic that we should fight amongst ourselves. It seems to me that substance rather than style is the important issue.

"End."

With respect,



Steven M. Zifferblatt

SMZ:am

P.S. I recently reviewed a manuscript by Bob Jeffries on Nutrition Education in the Supermarket. I have received a draft of the evaluation of my supermarket-based "Foods for Health" program and will send it to you. I imagine he is involved with your community education project. If you wait for NHLBI to release it your project may not be able to profit from these data and recommendations.



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*Cover. - Zifferblatt*

September 17, 1981

Steven M. Zifferblatt, Ph.D.  
Associate Director  
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Santa Monica, CA 90405

Dear Steve:

Wow! Read my article more carefully. It is formal except my comment at the end about Nathan Pritikin's "style", as you put it. There is not a note of hostility in the whole. We were delighted with his visit. There is only amazement at his remarkable self-assurance that he, and only he, is right. If you don't think that Nathan Pritikin is a classical self-deceived fanatic, then I suggest that we're all in trouble. The fact that he does many things well, for right and wrong reasons, is beside the point. He is lashing out at the world as the "persecuted genius". His idea that he thinks he's actually measuring diet and disease changes in a Louisiana town and his whole dialogue is classically fanatic. That doesn't mean that he is wrong. It means that neither on the basis of motivation, of temperament, of investigative skills can he be believed, even if he is 100% right. Read your letter carefully, Steve, and I think you'll find four pages of unusually sensitive defensiveness.

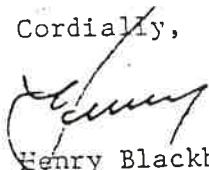
Finally, with regard to "deliberate character assassination", please be careful. This publication is by and for my civil service staff only, here in the laboratory, and goes to no one outside of our laboratory. It is not a lay publication. It does not go to MRFIT people or any others. I have a perfect right and obligation to express my opinion about the nature and impact of Nathan Pritikin's message in this laboratory, most of that audience being civil service staff. We enjoyed his visit thoroughly, and responded to it appropriately. I simply felt it was quite necessary to put his "rantings" (and they are you know) into perspective for uncritical civil service people. If you don't find him ranting, I suggest you listen more closely. Don't worry a bit about my little opinion, expressed in our private civil service gossip sheet.

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I will continue to defend much of what you are doing. I will continue to tell the world on public platforms that I think Nathan Pritikin has a great idea. I will continue to express, however I want to, and totally free of anger, my opinion that he expresses himself in uncritical, egocentric, messianic and careless and not fully informed ways. That's not anger, it's my opinion based on his obvious behavior. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't have great pride in what you are accomplishing, or that I don't admire some of it. But I felt the definite responsibility to point out the difference, to my staff, in our academic and quantitative approach and Pritikin's emotional, charismatic (and commercial) approach.

Sorry I ticked you off. To have embraced Nathan Pritikin means that you, friend, will need a much tougher skin and jaw. You, and he, are asking for far more academic criticism than necessary. He is unbelievable, because of his content and style.

Cordially,



Henry Blackburn, M.D.  
Professor and Director

HB:lmr

P.S.  
September 22, 1981

<sup>W.</sup>  
John Farquhar, M.D.  
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bpc  
Sent  
9-22-81

Dear Jack:

As you can imagine, I felt rather compelled to set the record straight after the old snake oil started my civil service staff a-buzzing. I made the mistake of sending this little private in-house communication to Steve Zifferblatt and got 4 pages of impassioned outpourings. I am sending them on to you because I am hoping that you can help him put things in perspective. I am in immense admiration of what Nathan Pritikin is (apparently) doing in terms of risk factor reduction. But he can't have it both ways: being charismatic, fanatic and commercial, versus having the scientific establishment laud and support him. He is a typical paranoid genius, meeting all the classical criteria of fanaticism. Steve Zifferblatt is going to have to get a lot tougher hide and a lot more dispassionate if he's going to be effective in his role.

I look forward very much to getting to your cigarette smoking control article. Our Mankato kickoff is this week and next and I am just barely hanging in. We've had some unfortunate circumstances in having to fire the Mankato director who didn't understand what he was supposed to do and didn't do anything. It is giving us a little rough start when we had planned, we thought, so carefully. I am sure we will see it through.

Thanks for letting us respond to your article and I'll get to it as soon as I can. I hope you will not mind my passing it on to Terry Pechacek, who is also involved with the Canadian smoking control program.