

Corres - Burchell



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Professor Emeritus Howard Burchell  
260 Woodlawn Avenue  
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Dear Howard:

Thanks for the copy of your September letter to Dan McNamara, which I have destroyed. I think Jerry Stamler's term should have been "cynics" rather than "skeptics." Talk about the absence of "definitive proof" is equivalent to "absolute or final truth," which we know are not attainable. Many are willing to make rational decisions for individual prudent practice but deny that this is possible for the public health. I'm more and more impressed with our apparent inability to get across the issue of the individual versus the population needs and approach. One listens to Lewis Thomas and Don Fredrickson and others so excited about increased understanding of mechanisms and the uniqueness of the individual. All the while they totally ignore and actually discourage the overwhelming importance of cultural/behavioral/social issues acting on individual mechanisms and susceptibility. It was interesting to hear Bob Good speak of water and soil minerals and eating patterns in the epidemiology of cancer in China. Maybe travel should be required of academicians to observe mass differences.

It is interesting that for the several years now that I have proposed a simplistic model trying to illustrate the difference in regard to determinants of individual and population levels of blood cholesterol level, I have never received an intelligent, informed criticism of it. I'm sure it should be criticized. For the several years now that I have re-exposed the proposition that mass disease is the result of powerful environmental factors acting on widespread susceptibility, I have never gotten constructive criticism from those who are the most learned with regard to mechanisms, individual differences and uniqueness. I'm not sure whether it's their brushing off of these syntheses as being superficial or whether it's such a larger conceptual gap that a number of people have not yet bridged it. In the many, many pages of excitement about "the baroque beauty of biology," in Fredrickson's recent NEJM review, there is not a single word about the influence of culture on disease--coming from a person responsible for research policy over the last decade.

Many thanks for your off-print. It is certainly difficult from our perspective to think that Harvey should have pondered whether the pumping of blood was simply to warm the periphery or to bring nutrients. Have you explored the

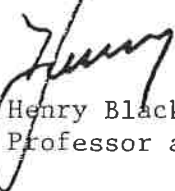
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claim of the Chinese to have antedated Harvey's discovery by some centuries?

Our rather tedious undertaking in MMMP I think is beginning to pay off in understanding. I think the next six months or a year will reveal some interesting findings. Our ability to demonstrate trends in morbidity remains to be established.

Here we will survive this tough period but the budget constraints have hit us rapidly. I look forward to seeing you again soon.

Cordially,



Henry Blackburn, M.D.  
Professor and Director

HB/jml