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*file*

October 9, 1981

Dr. Arnold Relman, Editor  
New England Journal of Medicine  
10 Shattuck St.  
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Dear Dr. Relman:

I hope you'll accept my puzzlement over publication of Fred Stare's unusual review of Jack Sprat's Legacy, The Science and Politics of Fat and Cholesterol, by P. Hausman, New York: Richard Marek, 1981, in the September 10 issue of the Journal. I express concern because the review is singularly uninformative about the book's contents or the strengths and weaknesses of its contribution.

I have read the book and believe that Dr. Stare is in error when he states that Ms. Hausman has mobilized no facts behind her arguments. There is a succinct and effective summary of the evidence concerning the role of eating pattern and nutrition in atherosclerosis, touching on the clinical, experimental and epidemiological information. To state that her only evidence is "demographic" is inaccurate. We hope that Dr. Stare hasn't confused demography with epidemiology. In fact, there is a short but to-the-point summary of the geographic pathology of atherosclerosis from the work of Henry McGill, of experimental pathology from the work of Robert Wissler, of epidemiological studies from the work of Ancel Keys, of clinical nutrition experiments and the development of predictive equations about the effect of diet on blood cholesterol from the works of Dr. Stare's colleagues at Harvard, Hegsted and McGandy, and information on the correlations between individual levels and bloodlipids and subsequent disease from Dr. Stare's colleagues Dawber and Kannel at Framingham. This is not "demographic comparisons."

One wonders if Dr. Stare read the useful chapter on controversy and the dissection of nine common arguments against dietary change for the general public. What did Dr. Stare think of Ms. Hausman's interesting analysis of the reason for the nutrition establishment's fascination with deficiency diseases in preference to involvement with diseases of excess or distorted dietary composition?

Where indeed is a proper review's description of the contents of the book so that Journal readers can develop their own opinion about whether they would be interested in it?

Why did Dr. Stare not refer to the excellent short chapter on diet and cancer? Was Dr. Stare totally unimpressed by the Appendices giving the fat and calorie content of common foods, natural and processed, or with the recommendations for reading in the bibliographic appendix?

I suspect that Hausman's description of the meat, dairy and egg lobbies and how they function would be of considerable interest to Journal readers in medicine, nutrition and public health. We need not agree with all the author's interpretations, but her observations on how those lobbies operate to influence national health and agricultural policy are fascinating. The reader emerges with much more understanding about the absence of health considerations in the major decisions made in this country for agriculture and food production, now geared mainly to increased productivity, consumption, safety or shelf life. The reader achieves much insight into how public health decisions are made, not made or unmade in this republic.

Dr. Stare rather emotionally lambastes Ms. Hausman as a "non-nutritionist" despite her holding a Masters degree in Nutrition. Does he earnestly believe that no one is capable of writing intelligent books on nutrition, or on the politics of nutrition from a journalistic approach, without being a member of a nutrition society? The combining of nutritional science with investigative journalism and even with "activist consumerism" is an interesting and I find useful and democratic undertaking. Would Dr. Stare similarly criticize the writings on nutrition of a Jane Brody in the New York Times or any of a number of other analytical approaches by truly "non-nutritionists?" If so, one might be inclined to evoke the old idea that "War is too important to be left to the generals," etc. I suspect there is a real place in our society for intelligent "non-nutritionist" analysis and criticism of nutrition and health policy which should help keep it honest.

Dr. Stare states that Ms. Hausman's arguments about the Food and Nutrition Board's controversial report, Toward Healthful Diets, are "unfair." Since her unfairness is not documented, the onus of fairness is clearly on the reviewer. I guess I find Dr. Stare's review incomplete, and uncritical scientifically. I wonder if it might not be useful to have an equally distinguished nutritionist such as Jean Mayer also review the book. At any rate, this is the first time I find a New England Journal book review so misleading and derogatory that I believe it deserves "equal time." Sorry!

Cordially,



Henry Blackburn, M.D.  
Professor and Director  
Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene,  
School of Public Health

HB:lr

bpc: P. Hausman  
M. Jacobson  
J. Stamler ✓ - enc. pc book review  
S. Grundy  
M. Winston

*Corres - Stamler*

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JEREMIAH STAMLER, M.D.  
PROFESSOR AND CHAIRMAN  
DINGMAN PROFESSOR OF CARDIOLOGY

December 4, 1981

*sent 12-14-81  
pc letter to J. Mayer.*

Arnold Relman, M.D.  
Editor, New England Journal of Medicine  
10 Shattuck Street  
Boston, MA 02115

Dear Dr. Relman:

This is a note for your information, and not for publication. It is merely to indicate my full and vigorous agreement with the estimate made by Dr. Henry Blackburn--in his letter to you of October 9, 1981--concerning the review by Fredrick Stare of the book, Jack Sprat's Legacy, The Science and Politics of Fat and Cholesterol, written by P. Hausman and published by Richard Marek, New York, 1981. The review by Dr. Stare, as published in your issue of September 10, 1981 is --I deeply regret to say--highly one-sided, non-objective, and biased.

I endorse Dr. Blackburn's proposal that there be another review by a distinguished nutritionist and concur that Jean Mayer is an excellent proposal.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Kindest regards.

Cordially,

*Jeremiah Stamler*  
Jeremiah Stamler, M.D.

JS/nd

Dictated by Dr. Stamler and signed in his absence.

cc: Dr. Henry Blackburn

*sent 12-14-81*  
*Jerry:*  
*By "embarrassing error" my letter, the most complete, was omitted from Dec. '81 issue which published 3 other letters! I don't know whether to believe it, Jerry.*