

Reply on page

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Professor Henry Blackburn,
Division of Epidemiology,
University of Minnesota School of Public Health,
Minneapolis, MN 55455
USA

Dear Henry,

I write to you, because obviously far too long time has passed since we have met to discuss any of our joint interests. My letter refers to the Seven Countries, and was prompted by the information that you had spoken to Dr Böthig against the plans to get support from WHO to some final efforts within the framework of the Seven Countries. I felt a need to tell you my views of the issue.

Some of the Seven Countries' cohorts are having 25 years' examinations and planning for further ones, and for mortality follow-up to the very end. Others, like the US Railways cohort, are producing mortality data beyond the 10 years' efforts already completed. Some further ones might be enticed to do the same, if organisational support, funds and an active cohort manager would exist.

As the cohorts have entered the gerontological age brackets, the problems to be posed and the analytical approaches evidently need to be reconsidered. Where actual follow-up examinations are being carried out, new items can be included. Although the cohort managers have been in contact with each other, collegial exchanges of views unfortunately have not led to a degree of standardisation of the new items, which would make international analyses of most of the new items feasible.

As you should have seen from the circulated communications, some strengthening of the central organisation was in the interests of everybody. The plan was to my mind straightforward: Ancel was to have as his "staff" the managers of the three currently most active cohorts, Kromhout, Menotti and Nissinen, and it was hoped that WHO would find it opportune to support the "poorer" cohorts with funds necessary for the mortality follow-up, and perhaps also facilitate some small meetings of those involved in the late examinations. WHO might also have been helpful in the selection and/or development of analytical approaches more appropriate to the terminal part of life than those hitherto employed for the Seven Countries. However, Menotti and his coworkers may also be able to make significant contributions in this respect.

This is, how I see the situation and the efforts to remedy the weaknesses. I learn from Aulikki Nissinen that on hearing your views, Dr Böhlig decided not to engage his unit in the project, as some of those concerned clearly was against it. However, the need for support remains. This would be just the right moment for you to come out with some constructive suggestions. I have none.

To finish a gloomy letter with a very positive note: I am deeply impressed by the training provided in your Division to a multitude of young Finns, generation after generation. I would be very grateful, if a list of all the names could be compiled, preferably with some indication of the time (e.g. calendar years). The time series would be well worth of a short article on postgraduate study abroad in the Finnish Medical Journal, as a small tribute to a great contribution by Ancel, you and the US taxpayers to epidemiology and prevention in Finland.

With best personal regards,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martti".

Martti J. Karvonen, MD, PhD