



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
TWIN CITIES

Division of Epidemiology
School of Public Health
1-210 Moos Tower
515 Delaware Street S.E.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
(612) 624-5400
FAX: (612) 625-8950

Corresp. VanAntwerp

June 25, 1990

Dr. Malin VanAntwerp, JD
Study Director
Committee to Evaluate the Artificial Heart Program of NHLBI
National Academy of Science
2101 Constitution Avenue
Washington, DC 20418

Dear Dr. VanAntwerp:

I am sorry that I am unable to present testimony at the July 13 meeting on the mechanical circulatory support system (MCSS). I am "on record" as a member of the NHLBI Cardiology Advisory Committee in 1977 against development of the prototype of a totally implantable artificial heart (TAH). It was my opinion then that it was not an advisable route, scientifically, ethically or economically. I spoke strongly against the development even of a prototype because I don't believe that society truly has a free choice after a prototype is developed. Issues of special interest and scientific and industrial coalitions and careers are by then heavily involved. I suspect that this strong stand against long-term circulatory support devices was responsible for my being removed prematurely from that Advisory Committee.

My opinion has not changed basically and I address myself to questions 5,6 and 8 of your May 29 letter. I believe that the decisions of the NHLBI Directors Office in 1988, to focus on the left ventricular assist device (LAS) rather than on the total artificial heart were appropriate and judicious. I believe that the reversal of that decision, based on political pressure, was infortunate.

I am delighted that the Institute of Medicine is now involved in this evaluation. I believe that the LVAS can be evaluated only in terms of an overall approach to the future of cardiac transplantation. The reasonably safe LVAS device is the logical lead-in to cardiac transplantation, if the latter is now accepted as a valid medical and societal approach to the severely damaged heart of end-stage function.

Even in an affluent culture, deployment of the TAH will clearly exaggerate our present medical, economic and ethical quandary. I believe that technological leadership in this field is not a major consideration for the scientific or economic position of the United States.

Sincerely,

Henry Blackburn (inf)

Henry Blackburn, MD
Professor and Director