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Memo - LPH Faculty

March 27, 1981

TO: LPH Faculty
FROM: Henry Blackburn
SUBJECT: Roy Dawber's book, The Framingham Study

There are many aspects of the early chapters in Roy Dawber's book on the Framingham Study that I recommend you read, as well as the book as a whole. An issue that has become particularly relevant to a Laboratory problem now, with the potential for more to develop in the future, is that of "analysts" versus "co-investigators" in data bases. This has occurred in instances in which new faculty have attempted to serve as analysts of the findings of prior research rather than being involved as true co-investigators, and when prior investigators may not have attempted, in a positive way, to involve and share with new faculty the exploitation of ideas in those collected data.

Roy Dawber's views seem to follow the line of the "old school." I point this out not to defend any view except to encourage the necessary real collaboration in which sometimes one is the leader, and sometimes one is the follower-collaborator. He speaks of Framingham analyses in Bethesda:

"The separation of the investigators collecting the data from those directly responsible for its analysis became a real problem. In spite of frequent meetings of all concerned, I found that as Principal Investigator, I had less and less control over the analysis. In addition, the staff at the National Institutes of Health became increasingly possessive of the data, ostensibly to preserve the confidentiality of medical records. The matter came to a head when the task of continuing the examination was assumed by the Boston Group under my direction. The question of ownership of the data still has not been completely resolved and has arisen in other studies financially supported by the NIH."

"My own insistence was that the data collected by an investigator in the study under his personal direction are primarily his. They must be available to him for analysis and reporting. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute authorities took the

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view that the data were theirs, and were not to be released to anyone. Fortunately, we arrived at reasonably amicable arrangements whereby earlier data were made available to me. The lesson I learned was that under no circumstances should any scientific investigator allow his work to be controlled by others who act not strictly as co-investigators but as analysts of the findings of the research."

This is an eloquent defense of one viewpoint. A more humane and professionally mature viewpoint, it would seem to me, would be obtained if the original Principal Investigator should involve in the active intellectual process, under careful ground rules of editorial policy, those who wish to participate in analyses in a way to further the accomplishment of the research and to further the careers of those who follow as well as that of the originator. Only in that way can research and careers grow from the contribution of the original leadership.

With respect to "ownership," it would seem to me that there could be little question in this case that the federal institute that initiated and supported the study "owned" the data, and that Dr. Dawber and others who participate in its analysis do so as a professional privilege and courtesy. Whether the issue is any different for a NIH grant to an individual investigator in an institution outside the federal government is also not clear.

I have attempted to set such editorial ground rules and privileges for the LPH data bases but they have been poorly followed all around. However, we must continue to try.

HB:jml