

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Division of Epidemiology
School of Public Health

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September 16, 1994

Dean Edith Leyasmeyer
Acting Dean
School of Public Health
Box 197 Campus Mail

Dear Edith:

This note elaborates on John Potter's forceful points about School policy on catering for public events. John has a strong and reasoned approach to eating patterns, both in his personal life and his public health stands. His personal customs, not shared by many on the faculty, are not the issue. The public health and School policy is the issue.

I, too, over the years have tried, not always successfully in this Division, to get people to think beyond their individual choices and individual rights to their personal roles, and to our institutional role, as models of public health. I have it on good authority (my wife) that my efforts in the Division were usually regarded by staff as something people had to do because of Dr. B. (when I was Director) rather than an appropriate example the Division needed to set. The faculty generally agreed with my policy.

I have been amazed at times in dealings with School faculty outside this Division, how little this concept is incorporated with us, that of public health example, taking professional stands on social issues, and of taking personal responsibility as examples of healthful living. These social ideas apparently hold little sway in our School.

It was quite some time ago, for example, when a faculty member, who was, and presumably is no longer, an inveterate pipe-smoker, was surprised that I should point out the incongruity of his smoking in the workplace because of his identity as a public health leader. It simply hadn't occurred to him that his smoking was anything other than an individual choice and prerogative. Those ideas have long ago changed,

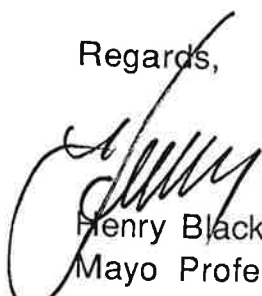
about smoking.

I think that John Potter has a good point for us to consider as an Institution. The idea that we should choose the "Divine Swine Caterer" might only offend a few million vegetarians and Orthodox Jews far from our campus. Perhaps "Bully Beef Caterers" would simply offend the distant millions of Hindus about the world. And I do recognize it's a good step that we offer alternatives (rolls, potato salad, fresh fruit and veggies and lemonade). But I have come to the view that examples rather than choices should be the leadership role of a public health institution. I have been pleased that the American Heart Association adopted this view in its catering for public gatherings, and its menus are most attractive. It is not just a matter of personal rights, but one of public and professional example.

So that you don't regard Potter's view as "from the fringe," I send along these arguments which you may or may not want to consider in future School activities.

Of course, since I have stepped down, we have "Pop Fountains" (choice of caffeine and decaff) on every floor in Epi! Sic transit--whatever!

Regards,



Henry Blackburn, MD
Mayo Professor of Public Health

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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December 5, 1994

Henry W. Blackburn, M.D.
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Dear Henry:

I very much enjoyed browsing through your wonderful volume of "Personal Adventures." You have great talent in bringing out the human interest side of your scientific endeavors! I took the liberty of sharing your leather-bound writings with Jim Boen and he believes that the *New Yorker* magazine may be one intriguing vehicle for a story on cholesterol. You may want to give him a call.

The Dean's Office really is not in a position to assist with publication costs of books or manuscripts. What I had in mind when you and I chatted was the possibility of having certain of your articles or memoirs published in *Minnesota Medicine*, *Minnesota* (the magazine of the U of M Alumni Association), *Health Sciences* magazine, etc., to give the School of Public Health and its illustrious faculty visibility during this anniversary year. I believe your accounts would make for exciting and fascinating reading!

If you are interested and willing to have some portions of your work published in sources like the ones mentioned above, please let me know. We are working with the Health Sciences Public Relations office to highlight "in print" the School and its faculty, and they assure us that public health will have its day in the sun.

Have a great time in Florida.

Best regards,



Edith D. Leyasmeyer, Ph.D.
Interim Dean

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