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September 25, 1974

Henry W. Blackburn, M.D.
 Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene
 University of Minnesota
 Stadium Gate 27
 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Dear Henry:

Below is a brief statement regarding the need for including Social Security numbers in the National Death Index as was requested of me at the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council on Epidemiology.

Inclusion of social security number as part of the National Death Index would greatly facilitate surveillance of several large-scale epidemiologic studies and intervention trials currently underway and those to be done in the future. These studies are all designed to determine whether large groups of persons who have been identified as having diverse characteristics or have been subjected to preventive programs actually manifest different mortality rates. As the medical sciences progress and general mortality decreases, it becomes necessary to follow larger and larger groups to obtain valid information about rarer diseases. Surveillance of such groups for mortality is currently a very tedious and fairly expensive chore. Errors are often made due to misspellings of names or change of names and omissions are frequent due to migration from one death registration area to another. These kinds of problems could be virtually eliminated and the whole cost and burden of surveillance greatly reduced if matching of death certificate information with the study variables could be done by means of an identifier such as the social security number.

For most medical studies, social security number could be included as part of the confidential section of the certificate and used in the same manner as medical information is currently used. Thus there would be no violation of the decedents' privacy for non-authorized purposes. Explicit consent for the death certificate information can be provided by the subject when he first enrolls in the study, if necessary.

Sincerely yours,

Manning Feinleib, M.D., Dr.P.H.
 Chief, Epidemiology Branch
 Division of Heart & Vascular Diseases

cc: Dr. Borhani
 Mr. L. Cook ✓

TIPPERAWAN
 B. P. W. WITAMORIN

SEP 30 1974