DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

National Institutes of Health

Center for Scientific Review
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

APR - 8 2002

March 28, 2002

Brian L. Strom, M.D., M.P.H.
Board Member
American College of Epidemiology
1500 Sunday Drive, Suite 102
Raleigh, North Carolina 27607

Dear Dr. Strom:

We have received your letter dated March 5, 2002, in which you expressed concern about the impact of the Panel on Scientific Boundaries for Review (PSBR) reorganization project upon the review of epidemiology related applications. In your letter, you opposed the recommendations of Study Section Boundaries (SSB) Teams that would allow for the review of epidemiology applications in non-epidemiologic study sections specializing in those diseases. You also wrote that the proposed study sections would include members lacking expertise in epidemiological methods and those members would be incapable of fairly reviewing the applications. Furthermore, you acknowledged that the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) currently has three epidemiology study sections that include members with a broad range of expertise who have over the years capably reviewed applications covering a wide range of health conditions.

The recommendations of the Panel on Scientific Boundaries for Review (PSBR) supported a reorganization of study sections in IRGs predominantly focused on disease or organ systems in order to create an improved review environment for current approaches to biomedical problems. They also, however, recommended that study sections in the Social Sciences, Nursing and Epidemiology Methods (SNEM) IRG, which were established in 1999, be excluded from the current reorganization. These new study sections were recently site visited by Working Groups of external consultants to evaluate their function and operation. The Working Groups' recommendations may suggest small adjustments within the current structure of the IRG. However, CSR will not destroy the integrity of the SNEM, nor the Risk, Prevention and Health Behavior and Behavioral (RPHB) and Bio-Behavioral Processes (BBBP) IRGs. As initial plans for reorganization of other IRGs are proposed by their respective SSB Teams and posted on the web, it is apparent that some research communities believe that epidemiological science should be more integrated into other aspects of biomedical science and reviewed by people who know about the disease as well as epidemiology. This may reflect a modern, multidisciplinary trend in medical research. Additionally, as set forth in the PSBR report, a degree of overlap is good.

However, at the present time, the epidemiology study sections will continue as defined by the present day IRGs and their study sections.

Please feel free to share this letter with other members of your community. We thank you for your letter, and trust that you are reassured that your scientific review areas will remain intact.

Sincerely,

Ellie Ehrenfeld, Ph.D.
Director