

September 20, 1947

John F. Mahoney, Medical Director
Director, V. D. Research Laboratory
U. S. Marine Hospital
Staten Island 4, New York

Dear Dr. Mahoney:

I feel tonight just as I felt when the news came of the decision to discontinue the Terre Haute project, although the blow is harder now than then, for we have so much more at stake and we have highly suggestive evidence to make us believe that we are on the right track with respect to prophylaxis. For as your letter of September 15 anticipated we shall, unless arrangements can be made, be faced with the dissolution of our staff which, under the circumstances is justified.

This morning at 7 A.M., just after I had returned from seeing our next gonorrhoea study group at the Base Militar and from depositing the last report to you in the APO, for security reasons, I saw with Sacha all of the 130 patients on whom we are doing syphilis studies. This was an exciting experience; all of the women inoculated by multiple pressure (smallpox technique) and receiving prophylaxis showed no evidence of infection in contrast to controls all of whom showed physical evidence of take. Most of the males who had had a 2x2 mm superficial abrasion of the penis and application of material showed papule formation or ulceration (still Darkfield negative) while those similarly exposed and given prophylaxis showed nothing. We left then and assembled with the group feeling exhilarated as though we might have the method of proof. And then the staff made plans to repeat the method on Sunday along with several other techniques, feeling as though we had hopes of success.

A little later we completed arrangements to take the inoculated girls, the first of whom has begun to show serologic evidence of syphilis, to begin studies on transmission via normal route. We felt as though at last we were getting somewhere.

This afternoon we received your letter and a similar note from Dr. Heller which pretty much blasted our hopes. The morale of all of the services here has been very low for the last month on account of the cuts in living allowances, but with the news of cuts for Mr. Portnoy and Miss Walker the morale of our group hit bottom. But all feel the need of seeing through what has been started. If we quit all new work as of now Dr. Levitan and Mr. Portnoy and Miss Walker will stay four more months to complete the work that is now under way. But it gives us all, along with our discouragement at the scientific loss we may suffer, a very empty feeling to realize that the U. S. Government has no responsibility whatsoever with respect to any commitments made to its own personnel, or, as we have seen, even with respect to commitments with foreign governments. You and Dr. Heller and the others have done all in your power to protect your people and to carry out your promises, but the law is the law and changes the rules from day to day and has no respect for the effort or promise of those designated as its agents.

You have invested in this project years of work and research from yourself and your staff, and before we have finished, more than \$50,000 will have been spent to bring us to the point at which we now find ourselves, the point at which we think that we shall be able to begin to make real contribution. And now, because of the decision of men who have no real knowledge or understanding of conditions or work here we shall be forced to stop for lack of personnel. I shall stay, for with the \$100 additional pay and the promotion (if it is approved) my salary will be essentially unchanged, and I have no family concerned. Dr. Levitan cannot afford to stay long even though there is nothing in the world that he would rather do, for it is financially impossible. Mr. Portnoy cannot afford to keep his family here any longer than the four months necessary to complete our syphilis studies underway.

As you intimate it will be difficult to secure replacement. With the cost of moving and getting settled here; and with the rising costs of living I could not, either, in good faith, recommend to any officer or civil service employee to come. A single man might break even, but it would cost him considerably more, than the cost of quarters and board in a Marine Hospital. A married man with children would be foolish to leave the States to come here under these circumstances. Aside from the consideration with respect to the financial aspect, any one coming would require a period of three to four months to learn enough Spanish to be of much help medically. Besides that I doubt very much that the service has many men of the calibre of our group who could be sent here. And to take advantage of our opportunities we should have only men of that type who are wrapped up in the problem and who are willing to work as our crew here now, from 5:00 A.M. on through midnight if needed, seven days per week, for weeks on end.

We have scientific opportunities which come only rarely, but in order to take advantage we need competent people, and competent people, also have to pay the costs of living required here, and cannot do the best work if they are under financial difficulties. It is true, as the committee probably thought, that the cost of living in the States is rising, but the cost of living here when we came was at least the equal of what it now is in the States, and the rise in costs there is reflected here, if not magnified. At the beginning we had the advantage of being able to get some food for our group from the Army Commissary, but that opportunity is now non-existent except for an occasional purchase of \$2 or \$3. Even the Army personnel here, who also had cuts, have not been able to get commissary supplies in amounts to help, so that the enlisted men are now having to send home the wives. It is impossible here for Americans to live as middle class Americans at home, for there are neither middle class nor middle class facilities here equivalent to those at which we are accustomed. It should be understood that none of us has significantly changed standards or mode of living.

As I pointed out, Elise and I can stay, but to illustrate the representative costs here I shall itemize the cost to keep my house.

Rent - \$90.00; stove wood \$20.00; Electric bill \$10.00, 1 servant \$15.00 (Elise does her own cooking and washing); gardener \$10.00, grocery bill \$20.00 \$30.00 (without including cost of any liquors and in addition to the store of army food bought earlier which cannot be replaced); meat \$15; Spanish lessons \$12; PX \$15; dry cleaning \$10; (1.50 for a dress or suit); milk \$5; market \$20 (fresh vegetables) paper \$1; garbage collector \$ 2.50)

These are fixed expenses, in addition there are the charges such as \$88 per year for auto insurance, \$65 for earthquake fire and theft and whatever we order for the safety of the household. Clothing, of course is not included, in spite of the rapid deterioration from laundry and mildew.

The Portnoy's pay a little less rent, but pay almost \$100 more for food, more for servants, \$20.00 per month for tuition for Barry, etc. Joe belongs to no clubs now and has cut out all recreational expense and still requires a minimum of \$400.00 right here just to live in addition to his costs for insurance, etc. It seems to be the thought in Washington that servants and nice homes are luxuries, but the houses cannot be run without at least one servant, and none of us is willing to live in a cheap house here, for even our own furniture would not fit, and they are completely unsuited for American standards of living. For this you can understand why the group cannot afford to stay, for these figures give some idea of costs.

After this very frank unburdening of my thought I should like to propose several possibilities for getting around the problem. It was my understanding that Mr. Portnoy and Miss Walker were given leave of absence from Civil Service and are now employed of Pan American Sanitary Bureau, an international health agency not subject to rules of U. S. Government. It was further my understanding that federal funds given as grants in aid have no strings attached so that the Pan American Sanitary Bureau can pay whatever it deems proper its own employees. For these reasons I cannot see why Mr. Portnoy and Miss Walker should come under the jurisdiction of an executive order cutting living allowances. The Institute of Inter-American Affairs has had no such cut in living allowance. If that should be the case why could not the commissioned officers be given leave of absence without pay and be put on the Pan American Sanitary Bureau payroll at a salary and living allowances equivalent to what was originally getting? It was my understanding that you had been told that your assignment of funds to Pan American Sanitary Bureau you would have jurisdiction over and freedom of use of funds not allowed by federal accounting practices and that personnel on leave to Pan American Sanitary Bureau would be handled by Pan American Sanitary Bureau and not according to Civil Service ruling since they were no longer civil service. For that reason I am much puzzled at the turn of events.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to find a way to keep the group together, for I think that the VDRL is on the track of tremendously important fundamental information, and if we have to break in a complete new staff we shall find ourselves only a little bit advanced in knowledge beyond that point at which they shall be four months from now when the studies now underway have been completed.

Sincerely,

John C. Cutler
Surgeon, USPHS