

January 5, 2009

Francis Collins, MD, PhD
Obama-Biden Transition Team

Dear Dr. Collins:

The Endocrine Society would like to take this opportunity to thank President-Elect Obama for his stated commitment to improving the health of all Americans through the support of biomedical research funding and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The Endocrine Society is the world's oldest, largest and most active professional organization of endocrinologists representing over 14,000 members worldwide. Our organization is dedicated to promoting excellence in research, education, and clinical practice in the field of endocrinology. The Society comprises thousands of researchers who depend on federal support for their careers and their scientific advances. Included below are a number of issues that we ask President-Elect Obama to consider when developing biomedical research-related policy.

Research Funding

The Endocrine Society remains deeply concerned about the future of biomedical research in the United States without sustained support from the federal government. The Society strongly supports the continued increase in federal funding for biomedical research in order to provide the additional resources needed to enable American scientists to address the burgeoning scientific opportunities and new health challenges that continue to confront us. The NIH specifically has had a significant impact on the United State's global preeminence in research and fostered the development of a biomedical research enterprise that is unrivaled throughout the world. However, with the continued decline in real dollars allocated to biomedical research each year by the federal government, the opportunities to discover life-changing cures and treatments have already begun to decrease. The Endocrine Society supports the long-term, sustained investment in NIH and biomedical research.

Research Direction

The Endocrine Society supports the NIH's ability to determine the direction of research it wishes to support and ultimately supports investigator-initiated research, as this type of research has been instrumental in the identification of basic biological processes that inform and impact a broad range of human health issues. Nonetheless, we wish to emphasize two areas of human health that we believe need additional research funding.

Diabetes and Obesity - As the incidence of chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity rises in our country, the NIH must provide increased research funding to identify new treatments and prevention strategies for these diseases.

Endocrine Disrupting Compounds (EDCs) - NIH should consider increasing research funding opportunities in the area of endocrine disruptors. This area is the focus of much current policy, and there are an insufficient number of studies into the long-term and latent endocrine effects to adequately inform policy. The American public is exposed to any number of chemicals on a daily basis, most of which have not been fully scrutinized for potentially harmful endocrine effects.

EDC Policy

The development and implementation of policies governing EDCs is currently a disjointed process resulting from uncoordinated efforts by multiple federal agencies. This lack of coordination and central oversight leads to conflicting assessments of the harm or potential harm to humans of low-dose exposure to EDCs. The conflict largely arises from different agencies' decisions to include or to exclude

hormonally relevant studies in the assessment process. Often, excluded studies are small studies designed to elucidate previously unrecognized effects rather than large studies designed to be statistically powerful. Most of the excluded studies are well designed, informative NIH-funded work by reputable scientists.

Health Disparities

NIH should continue its commitment to eliminating health disparities. The Society has a longstanding interest in improving the health of all Americans, and in 2006 appointed a task force to identify barriers to the participation of minority populations in the critical step of clinical research to identify treatments and best practices. The Task Force described its findings in the Society's white paper "Increasing Minority Participation in Clinical Research." The Society recommends that the NIH hold or participate in a summit that includes all stakeholders and is designed to address definitions of race/ethnicity and racially relevant data collection and analysis, and to develop plans for a national consortium to provide training, mentoring, startup funds, and opportunities for minority-serving physicians to participate in ongoing and future clinical trials.

Endocrinologist Workforce Issues

Scientists today face a highly demanding and challenging environment. Not only must they advance knowledge and improve medicine, but they also must compete for a decreasing pool of research funds. This jeopardizes not only the career of the principal investigator, who is actively seeking the grant funding, but also of the laboratory personnel whose jobs depend upon the continuation of that principal investigator's research program. As the prospect of a career in research becomes less appealing, the supply of scientists is likely to decrease. Fewer scientists and less research would result in this country losing its place as a leader in medical progress. The U.S. government must acknowledge this potentially bleak future and place more value and emphasis on research and development efforts as well as science education.

The Endocrine Society supports policy and funding decisions that help to strengthen the NIH and maintain its position as the world's preeminent research enterprise, and we look forward to working with President-Elect Obama on these issues. If we can be of assistance to you in any way, please contact Janet Kreizman, Senior Director, Government & Public Affairs at jkreizman@endo-society.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Carey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert M. Carey, MD, MACP
President
The Endocrine Society