

October 16, 2009

Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Sent via e-mail: NIH-LISTENS@nih.gov

Dear Dr. Collins,

Congratulations on your appointment as Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). We share your enthusiasm and support your vision for the areas of special opportunity you outlined in your September 9, 2009 Town Hall Meeting. The direction you have set forth will facilitate the speed of scientific discovery and its application to the treatment, prevention, and eradication of disease and promote the health of Americans and citizens around the globe.

As an association of more than 3,900 members worldwide, the Medical Library Association (MLA) maintains that quality health information underpins all aspects of health care. MLA believes that authoritative information is mission-critical to every health care enterprise. It is the foundation of all health care processes, including clinical care, biomedical research and the science of health care delivery, transformative health education, and the development of informed healthcare consumers. Health sciences librarians provide authoritative information in support of informed decision making to lower costs and reduce waste, improve health care quality and reduce medical errors, and enhance consumer choice. Accordingly, we applaud your goals for the future of the NIH and stand ready to support your efforts in the areas of exceptional opportunity you have identified.

Following is a summary of issues MLA would like to bring to your attention.

Translating basic science discoveries into new and better treatments.

- Robust investment in health IT. Breakthroughs in technology have revolutionized every aspect of healthcare from discovery to the bedside. Clinical research discovery teams are globally interconnected like never before, and the hope of personalized medicine tailored to each individual through the genomics revolution is coming closer to reality. Without a robust commitment to investment in health information technology (health IT), which includes support systems and databases at the National Library of Medicine (NLM), efforts to truly modernize the nation's healthcare will be significantly undermined.
- Support for NLM's infrastructure. For nearly 35 years, NLM has supported informatics research and training and the application of advanced computing and informatics to biomedical research and healthcare delivery. NLM has played a pivotal role in creating and nurturing the field of medical informatics, most notably through the creation of GenBank and a wide array of related scientific data and analysis tools which provide critical infrastructure for the nation's researchers. This infrastructure will be the key to advances in medicine in the future, such as discoveries manifested through the NIH Therapeutics for Rare and Neglected Diseases Program and NIH efforts to re-engineer the clinical research enterprise through translational research. The success of these and other initiatives will be furthered if NLM receives significant, ongoing support to ensure that its databases are properly maintained, expanded, and easily accessible to the public, researchers, and health care professionals.

Putting science to work for the benefit of health care reform.

- Formally include health sciences librarians in the discussion of health care reform. Timely access to relevant health information and education to improve health literacy can improve the quality of care and lower its cost. Low health literacy is linked to under-utilization of services, medication errors, increased hospitalizations, poor health outcomes, and higher health care costs. An informed and empowered patient plays a key role on the health care team and is critical to health care reform. Health sciences librarians are key components in health information access and literacy education and should be included in the health care reform discussion based on their recognized expertise in collecting, organizing, and disseminating health information to support informed clinical decisions, biomedical research, and education of professionals and consumers.

Encouraging a greater focus on global health.

- Involve the health sciences library community in the discussion of global health issues. MLA has a long history of collaboration with organizations seeking to promote global health. MLA's Librarians without Borders[®] program (<http://www.mlanet.org/resources/global/>) was established in 2005 to provide training in the field of information retrieval and library information assistance to people anywhere in the world, namely training in the use of computers used for health and medical research and general training on how to effectively conduct research using a library. To date, more than 20 workshops have been held in 15 developing countries around the globe. The Librarians without Borders[®] program also helps provide medical information for healthcare personnel responding to epidemics and natural man-made disasters anywhere in the world. Our experience with this and other initiatives affirms that there is a real need for librarians to be actively engaged in the development and implementation of services that serve the health information needs of our increasingly diverse global society.

Advancing transparency and communication between government agencies and the people they serve.

- Maintain transparency for federally funded biomedical research. Today, more than ever, libraries and librarians have unique opportunities to serve society by ensuring that all individuals have access to the information they need to make informed decisions that will further the quality of life for themselves, their families, communities, and the institutions they serve. The Internet provides quick access to information at home, in school, and in a library for everyone who might need it, including scientists, physicians, educators, and citizens. Unfortunately, quick and ready access does not mean free and equal access to online information. Oftentimes, individuals experience barriers and restrictions when trying to gain access to needed information for purposes of education, research, and health care. For this reason, MLA commends NIH for its establishment and support of the NIH Public Access Policy that mandates public access to the published results of federally funded research. We believe that such access is key to the advancement of scientific discovery and successful health outcomes by accelerating the translation of research results "from the bench to bedside." We further recommend establishment of similar policies in other federal agencies, as provided for in the Federal Research Public Access Act (FRPAA) of 2009.

Reinvigorating and empowering the biomedical research community.

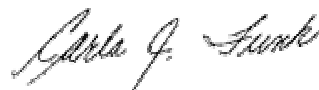
- Continued commitment to providing the NIH and NLM with meaningful funding increases on an annual basis. Annually, MLA submits written testimony before the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies in support of NIH and NLM funding. Our 2009 testimony recognized the critical importance of providing the NIH baseline budget with the funding increases necessary to allow the short-term growth generated by the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* to become a long-term investment towards improved public health through bolstered health information programs. We will continue our efforts to educate Congress about the importance of increased funding and work with the biomedical community to further this support.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our views with you. Please let us know how we can provide further support and assistance in the future.

Sincerely,



Connie Schardt, AHIP
President, MLA



Carla J. Funk, CAE
Executive Director, MLA

Organizational Biography

The Medical Library Association (MLA) is a nonprofit, educational organization, comprised of health sciences information professionals and institutions with 4,000 members worldwide. Through its programs and services, MLA provides lifelong education opportunities, supports a knowledgebase of health information research, and works with a global network of partners to promote the importance of quality information for improved health to the health care community and the public.