July 21, 1958

Dr. Albert B. Sabin  
Children's Hospital Research Found.  
Elland & Bethesda Avenues  
Cincinnati 29, Ohio

Dear Doctor Sabin:

Tomorrow, the 22nd of July, the National Foundation will announce its expanded program.

It seems proper that our grantees receive the enclosed "Confidential Memorandum", which was prepared for the trustees, and a copy of the general news release. Both of these may be of interest because they give you in some detail what we propose to do. Also they will serve, particularly the "Confidential Memorandum", as a permanent record.

You have served the National Foundation well, many of you for a long time. I trust that our association will continue and that we can look to you for help and guidance when needed.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas M. Rivers, M.D.  
Vice President-Medical Affairs

Enclosure (2)
Dear Doctor:

It has by now become apparent that the fight against paralytic poliomyelitis, though still unfinished, is well on its way toward success. Even before the spectacular decline of polio, the National Foundation began a prolonged, intensive study of its own capacities, and of the health needs of the nation to determine where in the future this organization might be of greatest usefulness. During these investigations many medical experts in every health field which was not adequately covered were consulted.

No health program can succeed without the active interest and assistance of the physicians of this country. Therefore we want you to know about our new and expanded program in its entirety just as soon as possible. The enclosed memorandum, prepared originally for our Trustees, is for your study.

The National Foundation's concept for the future envisages an organized force in the fields of medical research, patient aid and professional education with specific goals initially and flexible enough to meet new health problems as they arise. In essence this is a logical projection of our previous work in disease prevention, patient aid, research and professional education.

The broadened program, however, deals with much more than a single disease. At its core is expanded research to study viruses, the nature and behavior of cells, diseases of the central nervous system, arthritis and congenital malformations. Basic to this research program will be its freedom to follow new leads in whatever direction they point.

Arthritis and congenital malformations are, as you know, major causes of disability. The rheumatic diseases alone affect between 11 and 30 million persons in this country. Congenital malformations afflict some 250,000 American infants born each year.

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In both of these fields the National Foundation will seek causes, preventives and remedies. As soon as feasible it will provide patient aid for children through 18 suffering from arthritis and children through 18 with birth defects of the central nervous system amenable to treatment and correction. It is expected that this initial patient aid program can later be expanded.

Since 1938 when the National Foundation was established, it has had and appreciated the good will and dedicated assistance of the medical profession in the fight against paralytic polio. Even more than in the past, the National Foundation will need the wisdom and cooperation of the American medical profession. We are confident that our physicians, recognizing the urgency for the kind of research, patient aid and professional education the National Foundation will support, will join us in meeting these new challenges.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Thomas M. Rivers, M.D.
Vice President - Medical Affairs
NEW YORK, July 22 -- An expanded program that will permit a scientific assault on major health problems of the nation was announced today by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis.

Basil O'Connor, president of the organization that made possible the Salk polio vaccine, outlined its broad new program of future attack on disease and disability at a press conference this morning at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. He was scheduled to present the new program to key volunteers in 52 cities by closed circuit television at 3:30 EDT in the afternoon.

"This is our concept for the future: The development of an organized voluntary force in the fields of medical research, patient care and professional education, flexible enough to meet new health problems as they arise, with specific goals initially," Mr. O'Connor said.

"The heart of the new program is research. Research will not be confined to a single disease but will attack, initially, at least five areas."

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Mr. O'Connor said that the National Foundation, as it now will be known, would (1) carry on its winning fight against polio, (2) continue its history-making virus research program and (3) investigations of disorders of the central nervous system, and to these activities would add research and, in the near future, a patient aid program in (4) arthritis and (5) birth defects (congenital malformations).

Arthritis and birth defects are major health problems affecting millions of Americans and urgently in need of increased public attention and support, he asserted.

The expanded program will be financed, he said, through the traditional March of Dimes conducted each January since 1938 by volunteers in 3,100 chapters across the country.

"An attack on any disease requires a program much broader in concept than is usually understood," Mr. O'Connor stated. "Such a broad program may properly lead, as it has over the last 20 years in polio, into other areas. Our experience with viruses has demonstrated this process. At this moment virologists have uncovered clues pointing in many hopeful directions other than polio that should be followed up."

Mr. O'Connor made it clear that the enlarged program, while a natural outgrowth of work done in the course of finding a polio preventive and caring for polio victims, is a beginning program only and that the National Foundation -- by contributing its 20 years of broad experience in the field of health to the solution of other perplexing diseases of mankind -- hopes to shorten the period within which these diseases may be solved.
"There is need for a flexible, publicly supported foundation today," he continued. "It is needed because of its vast freedom to move promptly and effectively as rifts appear in the curtain that still covers the unknown in the field of health. This was dramatically demonstrated by the nationwide field trials of the polio vaccine in 1954, which established the safety and effectiveness of the Salk vaccine. It could only have been carried out through a voluntary association of the size of the National Foundation, which had the confidence of the American people.

"Such an organization can supply what is needed most of all in future activities—medical and lay leadership, formed into a partnership on both national and local levels. In the last decade we have all become more educated in the field of health. The public now realizes that a broad attack on health problems is worthy of support.

"As the time was ripe 20 years ago for a voluntary organization to fight a single threatening disease, so the hour now is right to enter the broader battle to which our experience has led us."

Freedom to follow research clues wherever they lead will be combined with necessary limitations on patient aid in the beginning, Mr. O'Connor stated. The limitations result from the enormity of the size of the problem: At least 11,000,000 persons have arthritis and rheumatism; 250,000 children are born with significant birth defects each year (excluding birth injuries), and an estimated 150,000 persons who have had paralytic polio will require some assistance in the years ahead.
It is planned to offer patient aid at first only to arthritis patients through 18 years of age and to children suffering from malformations of the central nervous system, also through age 18, Mr. O'Connor said. Rheumatoid arthritis, the most serious of the rheumatic cripplers, annually affects an estimated 30,000 children and adolescents, of whom some 16,000 can be expected to seek treatment each year. It is planned to work primarily with this group in the beginning because the most good can be done for them and the most learned of benefit to all arthritis sufferers, he explained.

"We also plan to aid some 8,000 patients annually with birth defects of the central nervous system that are treatable," Mr. O'Connor added. "Among these conditions are spina bifida (open spine), encephalocele (open skull) and hydrocephalus (water on the brain).

"While it is not planned initially to provide patient aid for children born each year with congenitally caused mental retardation," Mr. O'Connor continued, "we believe our research program may offer new hope in prevention and treatment of this problem.

"Our objective in patient care is to continue the polio job until it is finished. We have a moral obligation to do this and the American people expect us to recognize this responsibility. We shall begin patient aid in arthritis and birth defects, first, where it will do the most good and, second, on a scale commensurate with the public's willingness to finance it. To shape a broad program, much must be learned about precise numbers of patients, the number and quality of existing facilities and the availability of qualified personnel."

Mr. O'Connor stressed that no attempt will be made to duplicate the work of other voluntary agencies, although as scientific breakthroughs occur they will be pursued wherever they lead, with the general objective of improvement of man's health.

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He said the patient aid program in the two new areas would eventually be larger than anything hitherto achieved in either field, and would ultimately surpass the polio patient aid program, largest ever conducted by a voluntary health agency on a national scale.

The two new disease areas were chosen not only because of their importance to millions of Americans but also because the experience and skills of those working in the polio field can be utilized most effectively in these areas, Mr. O'Connor indicated. He cited two examples:

§ Work of National Foundation grantees in the field of cellular biology, which stemmed from the search for a tissue culture cell in which to grow polio virus for vaccine, has uncovered new knowledge about the basic machinery of human cells. This has led directly to the problem of abnormal cells, which account for at least half of significant birth defects. (The other half is probably caused by infection or injury to the embryo during its growth.)

§ The National Foundation's achievements in rehabilitation of handicapped polio patients make application of the professional skills involved both logical and hopeful for arthritic patients, as well as for post-surgical birth defects patients.

"You might say that we have grown into our new program by following leads that ranged far beyond polio," Mr. O'Connor remarked.

The new program was adopted after five years of unprecedented investigation of areas of need in the health field and careful assessment of the strengths of the National Foundation that could be applied to other problems. Conferences were held with medical, civic and governmental leaders, as well as representatives of National Foundation chapters from all regions of the country. The Board of Trustees approved the program on May 28, 1958.
Public demand for new horizons for the organization supported by the March of Dimes has been constant since it became apparent, in 1955, that control of paralytic polio was in sight, Mr. O'Connor said. A steady stream of requests from the general public, physicians, public health authorities and officers and board members of a number of other voluntary agencies was received, all asking that the National Foundation take on new tasks.

On May 21, 1958, the 50th Annual Governors Conference, meeting in Miami, expressed the nature of public demand with a unanimously passed resolution calling upon the National Foundation to "keep intact and expand its meaningful voluntary association, in order to continue its service in new areas of scientific research and to assist medical science to meet and conquer other unsolved diseases which plague mankind."

"A theme seemed to run through most of these requests," Mr. O'Connor said. "This was that the National Foundation had established a know-how for progress in the field of health, which should be used. The problem was to choose among the opportunities and challenges those in which the National Foundation could be most useful.

"As an organized force for medical research, patient care and professional education, we have chosen the broadest program of all. Through it, we hope that infantile paralysis one day may be considered only a fortunate beginning."