December 10, 1965

Albert B. Sabin, M. D.
The Children's Hospital Research Foundation
Elland Avenue and Bethesda
Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Dr. Sabin:

We are sending you herewith a copy of our reply to the recent letter from Dr. Walter M. Kirkendall of the University of Iowa concerning the Medical Tribune report of a symposium on suicide.

You will note that our reply refers to our intention to discuss this question with the Advisory Board. Although we are not scheduling the annual meeting with the Advisory Board in January as heretofore -- primarily because of pending developments which we wish to report at a slightly later date -- we do plan to arrange a meeting for the late winter or early spring. We will, of course, give each Board member ample notice of a tentative date so that schedules can be accommodated.

Our entire staff joins in wishing you a pleasant holiday season and a happy and satisfying New Year.

Sincerely yours,

Frederick Silber
Managing Editor

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Enc.
December 8, 1965

Walter M. Kirkendall, M. D.
Professor of Medicine
University Hospitals
University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

Dear Dr. Kirkendall:

We are grateful for your thoughtful letter of November 26 addressed to Mr. Doriot. The substance of your letter was the subject of considerable discussion here and provoked a great deal of thought on our part. We definitely agree that you have raised questions that ought to be aired and, with your approval, intend to publish your comments as a letter in our communications section.

Without necessarily arriving at definitive conclusions we would like to make some tentative comments:

There seem to be two aspects of your general criticism. One relates to the propriety of having a drug firm sponsor a medical symposium and this, of course, implies questions as to the propriety of the participation of physicians in such conferences or of the institution that provides the setting. The other aspect, independent of this, is one that concerns us more directly as a newspaper; this relates to the validity of our reporting such a conference as news for the medical profession after it has taken place.

For the most part, what you question seems to relate more to the conference itself and this certainly warrants discussion. From our own viewpoint, we start with the fact that the conference has taken place. We believe that we would not be performing our proper function of reporting newsworthy events or developments in medicine, then and wherever they occur, if we neglected such conferences. Obviously, the question of what is newsworthy and therefore what should be reported is an editorial judgment and should be based upon the objective contents of the conference as well as the stature of the participants rather than upon the sponsorship of the conference.

In the particular case you cite, namely, our reporting of the symposium on suicide, this was reported in two issues of Medical Tribune, November 3 and November 8, 1965. In both sections we clearly identified the fact that this conference was sponsored by Wallace Laboratories. In the first report the comments of such men as Dr. Stanley F. Yelles.
of N.I.M.H., Dr. Reginald S. Lourie, Clinical Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at George Washington University School of Medicine, and Dr. Melvin Sabshin, Professor and head of the Department of Psychiatry, University of Illinois College of Medicine, were reported. All of the comments of these individuals related to the subject matter of the symposium, namely, suicides, and none of these men to our knowledge were related to the Wallace Laboratories. In the second group of reports, the remarks of Dr. Milton Rosenbaum, Professor of Psychiatry and Chairman of the Department at Albert Einstein Medical College, and Drs. Eli Robbins and B. Murphy of the Department of Psychiatry, George Washington School of Medicine, were reported. In this instance, again, there was no relationship of these men to the Wallace Laboratories. In reporting the remarks of Dr. Frank Berger, his identity was clearly made as President and Director of Research of Wallace Laboratories and his comments were the only comments reported from someone who was specifically associated with the sponsoring company.

The practice of pharmaceutical companies of sponsoring various symposiums and conferences is not uncommon. In many instances such sponsorship consists only to some degree of financial support. In other cases, there may be more active participation. Whether this is a proper role for a pharmaceutical company is certainly debatable. What should not be debatable is the reporting of these conferences when the individuals participating and the reports they make merit such reporting.

As a matter of interest, we call to your attention the reporting by the Journal of the American Medical Association of this same conference on November 29, 1965. We assume that the JAMA reported this, as we also did, because of the overall interest in the subject matter. They too reported the comments made by Dr. F. M. Berger and properly identified him with Wallace Laboratories. But our own policy led us to be even more circumspect by identifying Wallace Laboratories as the sponsor of the entire symposium.

We will continue to discuss this question among ourselves and will also raise it at the next meeting of our Advisory Board for further guidance.

Sincerely yours,

Frederick Silber
Managing Editor

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