

Since the establishment of the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness, research in blinding eye disease has been managed administratively by this group.

The association of blinding eye disease with neurologic disorders is at best an artificial one.

The amount of blindness and visual disability that is caused by neurologic disease is minute. Additionally, many research techniques in neurological disorders, particularly those involving the central nervous system, are at the very earliest stages of development.

In contrast to this, the blinding diseases caused by inflammations of the eye, are in an organ easily accessible to observation, study, and treatment.

When one considers the number of individuals blinded by diabetes, by diseases of the blood vessels, by inflammatory disease, and by nutritional disease, it would be just as logical to include research in blindness in the National Heart Institute or the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

I emphasize this point principally to impress on you that the study of blinding eye disease constitutes an independent field and there is little likelihood that research can be expanded and applied unless eye diseases are managed in an independent institute.

My colleagues and I believed that a National Eye Institute would prove to be a vital instrument in the prevention of blinding disease.

With an institute focused solely on blinding disease, national leadership would be provided to expand the present research base and apply the findings of investigation to the conquest of blindness. It would provide administrative leadership by the Director of the Institute and a properly oriented approach by his staff and the advisory council for the Institute.

Such a national advisory council would encompass not only talented scientists for scientific consultations, but leaders of philanthropy in blindness and rehabilitation familiar with the needs and problems of the blind and the requirements or returning the blinded citizen to his proper place in society.

The influence of such a national advisory council dedicated to the prevention and cure of blinding eye disease cannot be underestimated.

Ad hoc committees, special advisory committees, and subsidiary groups reporting to the Director of an Institute and his staff cannot provide the leadership and advice that a National Eye Advisory Council could provide.

The establishment of an Eye Institute would call for an Institute Director skilled in the field and a staff dedicated to the problems of blinding disease and capable of bringing together the best medical minds to develop the creative concepts and the methods necessary to meet the challenge of blindness.

Such a group would provide an impetus for the solution of the problems of blinding eye disease which has not been possible with the present administrative arrangement.

As you gentlemen know, the National Institutes of Health have a research team at Bethesda unmatched by any in the world. The program at Bethesda centers about two principal areas: the first at the clinical center where the problems of disease are studied, and the second in the intramural laboratories which are devoted in the main to basic research.