

The establishment of an Eye Institute would provide the administrative mechanism for establishing research laboratories in blinding disease at Bethesda which could provide the model for research development as has been done in heart disease, cancer, neurologic disease, and arthritis and metabolism.

At present there is not a single intramural laboratory at Bethesda devoted to the problems of blinding eye disease. The sole ophthalmic research at Bethesda is carried on within the clinical center.

It is first class in every respect but it does not provide the facilities for basic research that are available in other Institutes.

We envisage the Eye Institute as developing intramural laboratories devoted to hereditary disease of the eye, tumors of the eye, the nervous and muscle control of the eyes, and the relationship to vision.

We believe that the areas of physiologic optics must be adequately supported. A major research program devoted to the causes of refractive errors and blindness due to nearsightedness is long overdue.

We see intramural laboratories as complementing research studies supported at a National Eye Institute as occurs in other National Institutes.

Additionally the establishment of the National Eye Institute would provide a means of communication between scientists in the other Institutes which we do not now enjoy.

Neglect in the study of blinding disease has not arisen because of inability to seek solutions or inability to secure skilled and competent investigators. Rather the toll of blindness continues because of lack of a sense of urgency and the absence of programs to solve the problems.

We need a program in the investigation of blindness from variations in the shape of the eye such as occurs in nearsightedness. We lack adequate programs in the best methods of rehabilitating those already hopelessly blind and in programs dealing with engineering methods to provide the development of other senses in those who cannot use their sight.

This neglect is not due to lack of compassion or counsel or interest in these fields on the part of the National Institutes of Health.

It is due to the fact that blindness and blinding eye disease cannot have the priority required in an institute with major interest and priorities in an unrelated field.

In the field of ocular surgery there have been unusual developments in the provision of operating microscopes with zoom lenses and attached cameras permitting the most exquisite surgery that has ever been carried out.

There is tremendous need, however, for a marked expansion in the instrumentation used not only in ocular surgery but in ocular diagnosis.

Combined with this is the need for automation of much equipment so that valuable personnel might be freed for other important tasks.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, our group does not believe that the present structure of the National Institutes of Health is so administratively constituted that it can carry out his broad purpose.