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September 17, 1981

Dr. Philip H. Abelson  
Editor, SCIENCE  
1515 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, D. C. 20005

REPOSITORY	<u>Oak Ridge Operations office</u>
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BOX No.	<u>B-64-18 Bldg. 2714-H</u>
FOLDER	<u>ORAU-5855</u>

Dear Dr. Abelson:

A recent news report ("Human Guinea Pigs at Oak Ridge?," September 4th edition of Science) did not reach the standards of accuracy and technical quality expected and deserved by Oak Ridge Associated Universities, AAAS members, and others who read the publication.

There were a number of inaccuracies, perhaps insignificant from a distance but very important to those who take their work, professional reputation, and standard of ethics very seriously at Oak Ridge. Rather than list all points which concerned ORAU, for clarification we would like to emphasize several basic facts:

1. Patients were never "used as human guinea pigs" in the sense conveyed by the Mother Jones article; i.e., as unknowing victims of experiments for purposes other than their best interests. The Science headline with a question mark did a disservice to the compassionate doctors and staff who always put the needs of the patient first.
2. Dwayne Sexton, the child exploited in the Mother Jones article, did not receive high levels of radiation "to test man's tolerance of radiation in space," but in a last-ditch effort to save his life. Conventional chemotherapy and other treatments had failed. The child was dying; his doctors concluded that the high levels of radiation were essentially the only chance to extend his life. In fact, he lived 3.5 years after first entering our clinic with leukemia.
3. It is true that patients did receive experimental treatments with total body irradiation and that some of the data was provided to NASA--but as part of a retrospective study, not the treatment protocol. This study also examined 3000 patient records from 46 hospitals. Ironically, the Sexton boy's data was probably not given to NASA at all. We find no record of doing so. In fact, ORAU had completed the report to NASA on high-level radiation in 1967--the year before the Sexton boy died. In 1968 the primary interest at NASA was in low-level radiation.

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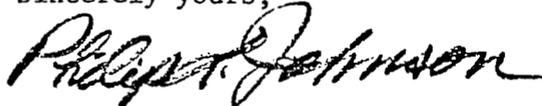
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4. The Mother Jones article and Science seemed to indicate doubt that the child's parents were properly informed about the treatment. They were--both verbally and in explanations written in lay language and signed by Mr. and Mrs. Sexton. The parents clearly gave ORAU their informed consent.
5. Although ORAU acknowledges that some program reviewers questioned the research value of some of the work of the clinic and the quality of the general facilities, the fact is that patient requirements always came before potential data, and good equipment was more important than high-quality buildings per se. We did the best we could within available government funds, including substantial contributions to the development of nuclear medicine over the past 30 years.

The Science article quoted "a spokesman for the Medical Divison" (who incidentally is a very competent DOE information professional) as denying the thrust of the article, but challenging few of the facts. To deny the "thrust" is everything: ORAU's primary goal was always to help the patient and further the benefit of nuclear medicine, never to experiment in order to learn "how much radiation astronauts could tolerate before becoming sick."

ORAU is an operating contractor for the U. S. Department of Energy, formerly the Atomic Energy Commission; it is also a constituent member of AAAS. It is not a component of Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Sincerely yours,



Philip L. Johnson  
Executive Director

PLJ:ahp

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