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REPORT OF THE VISITING COMMITTEE OF THE BROOKHAVEN MEDICAL DEPARTMENT

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The visiting committee to the Medical Department of the Brookhaven National Laboratories held its annual meeting with the staff of the Medical Department on May 13th and 14th. Present were Doctors Bradley, Thorpe, Kunkel, Kendrew, Ross, Furth and Friedell. The committee also had the privilege of meeting with Dr. Chamberlain and Dr. Sweet, of the Associated Universities. (Dr. Stotz unfortunately was unable to be present because of illness.) The meeting followed the general format of specific presentations before the entire group on the first day and individual visits to laboratories by various sections of the committee for more informal and intimate review.

The general arrangement of the meeting was satisfactory and on the whole reflected improvement over previous meetings in that fewer topics were placed on the agenda giving better opportunity for amplifying the progress and direction of specific activities.

Without reviewing the nature of each presentation I think it may be said that the committee was able to obtain a reasonable survey of the extent and nature of the program. Although full appreciation of the research is necessarily incomplete the presentations provided a reasonable basis for the deliberations of the committee on the direction and competence of the programs.

It is important here to refer back to the special report prepared in 1967 after an extraordinary meeting of the medical visiting committee on June 20th in which there was specific review of the program and policies of the Brookhaven National Laboratories Medical Research Program. Since this was a full scale examination of the program and policies which had

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not been held for a number of years it was very thorough and reflected in very admirable fashion the general course and program of the Research Program.

I believe the report of June 20th, as it was written then, is still a very firm platform for any additional comments and it may be said that the report emphasizes many essential features which indicated unique and purposeful developments and which must be clearly retained.

We would be remiss in our duty, however, and less than candid, if indeed we did not point out that there were some disconcerting aspects of the presentations.

Although we indicated above that the general format was quite satisfactory, the presentations raised a number of questions. Some were not organized skillfully enough to clearly indicate the general trends of the specific problems or to pinpoint or emphasize areas of new advances. Others were unsatisfactory in that they appeared to present or to reflect work that had been done in previous years and that progress was extremely limited or nonexistent. The resolve of some of the investigators naturally received some scrutiny. (The presentations in question have been identified for the Director.)

The work in Parkinson's Disease perhaps is given special attention since it is a new development and deserves emphasis in that, although it is not strictly along the lines which might be expected from a laboratory devoted primarily to radiation and its attendant activities, it nevertheless may culminate in new knowledge and a highly effective and useful attack on Parkinson's Disease.

Emerging from our general discussions and deliberations was the constant concern of improved interdigitation with, or better application of, the superior physical and technical competence inherent in the structure and facilities of Brookhaven Laboratories. It was the feeling of many members that the laboratory should examine all means of making more cohesive the many unique facilities of the laboratory. The impression, on the contrary, was given that in fact there was isolation rather than close collaboration and that the special techniques that might be conjoined in such a laboratory were not clearly in evidence. Again this impression may in part be due to lack of skill in presentation and if indeed this impact and collaboration exists and is in play, future presentations would do well to emphasize this.

The committee had some specific recommendations with regard to the nature of the joint exchange with the Committee on Biology. It was the opinion of the committee that close contact with the Committee on Biology was useful and should be continued. A special meeting perhaps requires an inordinate amount of the limited time, and it was suggested that subsequent meetings might be centered around a joint luncheon, slightly extended, so that this continuing exchange can proceed.

The joint proposal for the new building program appears to have taken a different direction than was contemplated in previous years. The committee again urges that a suitable area be established between the Medical Department and the Biology Department so that effective and meaningful cooperation can continue to develop. The proposed new construction tends to give the impression that the original purpose of the building for Molecular Biology had been blunted or diverted.

The proposal for additional beds raised questions which perhaps have not received the fullest examination and resolution. This is, in essence,

before the committee for the first time and the committee feels that at the moment it has not developed a carefully considered position.

As stated in previous reports, the committee continues to urge that close collaboration be vigorously pursued with the emerging University at Stonybrook.

In recapitulation, I believe that our critical comments need to be tempered with the realization that we may indeed have unnecessarily emphasized them or even exaggerated them in order to make them obvious. I believe that great credit must be given to Brookhaven and its administrative staff and structure for holding together a group of diverse scientists who have pursued vigorously many important researches in the past and whose achievements are secure and considerable. I think it is important to recognize that a visiting committee should avoid imposing with undue force its own particular views and ideas. The genius of individual direction, development and pursuit must somehow be permitted to flourish. I must again refer back to the special report of 1967 since it had a unique objective in the general long range trends and views and reexamination a year later has not substantially changed this position.

The comments made here deserve attention but I believe that a rectification of any of the problems or alterations in direction are long range and gradual and do not represent proposals for abrupt change.

H. L. Friedell, Acting Chairman
Visiting Committee