

October 1, 1964

John I. Nurnberger
Chairman, Committee on Program
Society of Biological Psychiatry
2010 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90057

Dear John:

My assistants and I have discussed the problems presented in your recent letter. Two problems come to mind as central topical areas.

Much psychiatric research is being done with animals and while there is occasionally reference made to the species involved many reports are presented in which the comment is "young dogs" or "rabbits", etc. These non-specific terms hide the great variability within the species and among species. We have been preoccupied for years ^{with} the species differences among humans and especially the sub-classification of "sick humans". In psychopharmacology we pay a great deal of lip service to the needs of toxicity studies and trials of new compounds in animals before administration in man and we know very little about how to translate the observations in animals to man. For these reasons I would suggest one central area as the interrelationships in observations in animals and in man in psychiatric research.

During the past decade there has been a great deal of emphasis on the neurohumors adrenalin, noradrenalin and serotonin. Biochemists, pharmacologists and psychiatrists seem preoccupied in tracking down this model. When we look at the pharmacology of the most active psychotropic drugs, examine the most potent hallucinogens, try to understand the convulsive therapy process, we always come back to acetylcholine and cholinergic mechanisms. I can not understand why these have been so grossly ignored - unless it is that the methods of assay are difficult or that the psychiatric leaders in Washington who seem to set our styles, have followed the lead of the cardiac psychologists for whom adrenergic mechanisms are most important. With this background, I would like to recommend a second topical area, that of cholinergic mechanisms in mental illness.

While I have some general ideas of the first topical area which I will gladly share with you if the subject interests you, I should like to make a special recommendation in regard to the

October 1, 1964

John I. Nurnberger, M.D.

second field. For many years I have been interested in the problem of antagonists to hallucinogens and during the present year have been most fortunate in having two associates join my staff whose interest in this area is also great. I should like to suggest, therefore, that you consider a symposium in the general problem of "Antagonists to Hallucinogens as a theoretical model for the mode of action of drugs". I would like to recommend that participants include Dr. Gershon and Itil of this staff, Abood (Chicago), Dille (Washington), Schueller (New Orleans), Zola Horowitz (New Jersey), H. Wills (Baltimore), Hock (New York) and Stevenson (Richmond).

Knowing our president, I believe that either subject would be of great interest to him. I agree that we should be prepared to have a program focussed on psychopharmacology and I look forward to discussing this further with you.

I trust these comments are helpful and I look forward to having you visit St. Louis soon. My assistant, Dr. Sletten who has been in touch with you, should work out a date which is mutually helpful.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.
Director

mf/ls