

Roger O. McClellan, DVM, DABT, DABVT
Advisor, Toxicology and Human Health Risk Analysis
13701 Quaking Aspen Place N.E.
Albuquerque, NM 87111-7168
Tel: 505-296-7083
E-mail: roger.o.mcclellan@att.net

January 21, 2005

Dr. Philip E. Mirkes
Director
Center for Environmental and Rural
Health
Texas A&M University
Room 423, Veterinary Research Building (#1197)
4455 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-4455

Dear Dr. Mirkes:

This letter documents the consensus views of the External Advisory Board (EAB) for the Center for Environmental and Rural Health (CERH) based on our visit to the Center on December 14, 2004. The members of the External Advisory Board in attendance are listed in Attachment A and the agenda for the meeting is provided in Attachment B.

The EAB members appreciated the opportunity to hear presentations from the CERH faculty participants and engage in face-to-face dialogue. The attention given to logistical details, the quality of the presentations and the TAMU-CERH hospitality which we have grown accustomed to from our prior visits certainly facilitated a productive meeting. This letter is intended to complement the suggestions offered during the meeting and in our executive sessions with you and Dr. James A. Calvin.

The EAB was unanimous in expressing a positive opinion as to the current directions and content of CERH programs, the quality of the participants, its impact on TAMU research and graduate programs in environmental and rural health and the leadership of the Center.

LEADERSHIP

The Board is very pleased with the progress you have made as a new Center Director in a very short period of time. You have developed an in-depth understanding of the Center's activities and the role and contributions (both past and anticipated) of individual participants, developed effective relationships with senior TAMU leadership and initiated the re-orientation of selected elements of the Center. In our opinion, the CERH has a tradition of excellence and, under your leadership, has the potential for reaching an even higher level of achievement.

RESEARCH CORES

The Board appreciated receiving oral presentations on the current status of and plans for the research cores in (a) Developmental Biology, and (b) Reproductive Biology as the two cores are being reorganized into two separate cores. The rationale given for the change seems appropriate. The Board is optimistic that both cores will flourish in the future.

The Board, while recognizing the need for individual research cores, notes that it is important to promote both intra-core and inter-core collaborations. At its next meeting the Board would like to be briefed on how both kinds of collaboration are being promoted and achieved.

FACILITY CORES

The briefings on the six Facility Cores were all informative. The changes articulated seem appropriate and are anticipated to further enhance the impact of the Center on multiple research efforts.

The Board took special note of the changes being made in the Biostatistics/Bioinformatics Facility Core and is optimistic that changes will further enhance the biostatistical/bioinformatics content of multiple research activities. In part, the Board's optimism relates to the tradition of excellence in these areas at TAMU. As in the past, it will be important to continue to draw a distinction between the facility core activities and the related, but different, research activities being carried out to advance the fields of biostatistics and bioinformatics

The Board did note the continued high quality services provided to Center Investigators by the Image Analysis Core. This core would appear to serve as a template in many ways for how a facility core can be managed and staffed to achieve impact. One area that is deserving of continued attention is how the provision of pathology services to

Center participants can be enhanced. It would appear that this is an area with potential for mutual benefit – enhanced pathology assistance to Center participants and stimulation of research by pathologists within the College of Veterinary Medicine.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

The Center has had a tradition of a strong Community Outreach and Education Program. The Board was pleased to note that the program, with new leadership, appears to continue to achieve its objectives and have impact. During the next year it will be important to publish additional papers that document the Program's activities.

PILOT PROJECTS

The Board was very impressed with the management and conduct of the Pilot Projects effort. The leveraging effect of the Pilot Projects appears to be very substantial. The results are so positive it will be important to make certain they are accurately documented.

DOCUMENTATION

From both the presentations and “side bar” conversations, the Board Members came away with a very positive view as to the range of CERH activities being carried out. This includes meetings of participants in the various cores, seminars, informal interactions, external presentations and, finally publication of peer-reviewed manuscripts. The result is a vibrant center that is having impact. Nonetheless, there appears to be an opportunity to document, and manage, these activities better in a proactive way rather than placing dependence primarily on reporting of year-end statistics. Obviously, end-of-year documentation is important. What is more important is the opportunity to use the statistical data on an on-going basis to enhance the management of the Center's multiple activities and further increase the achievements.

TAMU ORGANIZATION

The Board recognizes that each institution has its own unique organizational structure in which activities such as the CERH operate. TAMU and its related organizations appear to have one of the more complex structures encountered by Board Members. It is important that the nature of this structure be clearly conveyed to any individuals reviewing and interacting with the CERH. In making this comment, the Board wants to emphasize it has been impressed with the strong support CERH has received from the leadership of all facets of TAMU. The point the Board is making is that this strong support is most evident to observers such as the Board when the observers

understand the organizational and geographic relationships of the various elements of the “TAMU family.”

NEAR-TERM ACTIVITIES AND ROLE OF EAB

The Board recognizes that in the near-term the leadership of the CERH and participants in the various activities will be spending considerable effort preparing for the next renewal submission to NIEHS and the related site visit. The Board is eager to be of assistance to the CERH in a way that will be helpful. This includes reviewing and commenting on the draft proposal and participating in a preview of the presentations to be given to the NIEHS review team. The Board was impressed with the current state of preparation for the competing renewal, and feels that the CERH is well positioned to develop a very competitive application. That said, it is important that the momentum created at this relatively early stage of preparation not be lost in the coming months. We look forward to receiving a schedule from you as to our participation in these and any other activities you deem appropriate.

The Board is confident the CERH has a great story to tell with regard to its past success and its plans for the future. The Challenges with regard to the past is to organize and synthesize the voluminous amount of information, including statistical data, on past activities and outputs. In doing this, we are convinced that you can clearly document and illustrate the impact of the CERH over the years in enhancing environmental and rural health research and outreach at TAMU. In developing plans for the CERH for the future, the Board urges the CERH leadership and participants to carefully consider the array of opportunities at hand and then from this broad array be highly selective in deciding where to focus the CERH resources in the future. The need for making choices is apparent when one considers the modest level of financial resources available to the CERH from NIEHS even when leveraged with TAMU funding. It is obvious that the CERH cannot be a provider to everyone. However, it can support a select number of focused activities in a few Research Cores supported by a few highly efficient and effective Facility Cores.

FUTURE EAB INTERACTIONS

Looking to the longer range future and the role of the External Advisory Board, the Board offers several comments. First and foremost, the EAB recognizes it is advisory to the CERH and its Director. We are eager to assist you in any way you deem appropriate so do not hesitate to ask us individually or collectively for our advice. Second, the more knowledgeable the EAB can be of CERH activities the easier it will be

for us to be engaged and offer advice. In this regard, please feel free to share CERH annual and other progress reports with us. We welcome the opportunity to be made aware of recent activities and publications and have the opportunity to request selected publications for our personal review. Third, it would be useful to receive this kind of information, including summary financial information, in advance of the EAB's periodic meetings. Fourth, it would be appropriate now that the CERH EAB has been functioning for a few years to re-evaluate the format for the EAB meetings. Perhaps with information on the total CERH at hand prior to the meeting, a major portion of the meeting could be used to address one or several critical issues of concern to the CERH Director and participants. Perhaps, some portion of the EAB meetings could be reformatted to provide for more informal interactions. For example, one could envision a luncheon format that has one or two EAB members seated with a cross-section of CERH participants providing the opportunity for informal discussion of how the CERH has impact.

OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

In closing, let me again express the very positive view of the EAB for the past successes of the CERH and our optimism for its future successes and contributions under your leadership.

Sincerely,

Roger O. McClellan, DVM, DABT, DABVT, FATS
Advisor, Toxicology and Human Health Risk Analysis

Attachments:

Appendix A

External Advisory Board Membership

Appendix B

Program for December 14, 2004 Meeting

APPENDIX A

External Advisory Board
Center for Environmental and Rural health
Texas A&M University

Current EAB Members:

Daniel Acosta, Ph.D.
Dean
College of Pharmacy
University of Cincinnati
3223 Eden Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 4526
e-mail: daniel.acosta@uc.edu

Dennis M. Bier, M.D.
Professor of Pediatrics
Baylor College of Medicine
Director, CNRC
USDA/ARS
1100 Bates Street
Houston, TX 77030
e-mail: dbier@bcm.tmc.edu

David Eaton, Ph.D.
Associate Dean of Research,
School of Public Health and Community Medicine
Director, Center for Ecogenetics and Environmental Health
University of Washington
4225 Roosevelt Way NE, Suite 100
Seattle, WA 98105-6099
e-mail: deaton@u.washington.edu

Roger O. McClellan, DVM, DABT, DABVT
Advisor, Toxicology and Human Health Risk Analysis
13701 Quaking Aspen Place N.E.
Albuquerque, NM 87111-7168
e-mail: roger.o.mcclellan@att.net

Dr. Cheryl Walker
UTMD Anderson
Cancer Center
Department of Carcinogenesis
PO Box 389
Park Road 1C
Smithville, TX 78957
e-mail: cwalker@odin.mdacc.tmc.edu

APPENDIX B

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND RURAL HEALTH
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843

AGENDA
Tuesday, December 14, 2004

CERH External Advisory Board Review
Room 423, Veterinary Medical Research Building

Welcome and Overview

8:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast

9:00-9:10 Welcome – Drs. Philip E. Mirkes, Director and James A. Calvin,
Executive Associate Vice President for Research

9:10-9:30 Overview of progress – Dr. Philip E. Mirkes, Director
9:30-9:45 Discussion

Research Core Presentations

9:45-10:00 Developmental Biology Research Core – Dr. Richard Finnell
10:00-10:15 Discussion

10:15-10:30 Break

10:30-10:45 Reproductive Biology Research Core – Dr. Thomas Spencer
10:45-10:55 Discussion

Facility Core Presentations

10:55-11:10 Biostatistics/Bioinformatics Facility Core – Drs. Raymond Carroll
and James Calvin
11:10-11:20 Discussion

11:20-11:35 Genomics Facility Core – Dr. Robert Chapkin
11:35-11:45 Discussion

11:45-1:00 Executive Lunch

1:00-1:15 Transgenic Facility Core – Dr. Jim Martin
1:15-1:25 Discussion

1:25-1:40 Protein Technologies Facility Core – Dr. Larry Dangott
1:40-1:50 Discussion

1:50-2:05 Image Analysis Facility Core – Dr. Robert Burghardt
2:05-2:15 Discussion

2:15-2:30	Analytical Facility Core – Dr. Kirby Donnelly
2:30-2:40	Discussion
2:40-2:55	<i>Break</i>
2:55-3:10	Community Outreach and Education Program – Mrs. Carmen Sumaya
3:10-3:15	Discussion
3:15-3:20	Pilot Projects – Dr. Robert Chapkin
3:20-3:25	Discussion
3:25-4:15	<i>Executive Session – EAB and SAG</i>
4:15	Adjournment