



NOV 18 2010

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grass[ey]:

Thank you for your October 22 letter expressing concern about sponsored travel by employees of the National Cancer Institute (NCI). You questioned NCI's adherence to policies of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and requested that NCI conduct an internal review regarding the reporting of sponsored travel to the Office of Government Ethics (aGE). Finally, you requested specific information about sponsored travel during 2008, 2009, and 2010 for 16 NCI scientists listed by name. We appreciate this opportunity to correct any misunderstandings about NCI's sponsored travel practices.

We agree that sponsored travel by government employees must be closely scrutinized to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations and to guard against potential conflicts of interest and perceptions of bias. We assure you that compliance with travel and all other applicable regulations is a high priority for NIH generally and NCI specifically. Accordingly, all requests to accept sponsored travel undergo a rigorous and substantive analysis for appropriateness and potential conflict of interest. -

Scientific progress is dependent on the active dissemination and exchange of new data and ideas. It is vital that NIH scientists participate in scientific meetings where direct interactions with other scientists often catalyze new ideas, promote collaboration, and fuel innovation. Medical research, including cancer research, is advancing rapidly in the current era, so it is critical to share emerging data to work efficiently in these fields. NCI's use of the sponsored travel mechanism — in accordance with applicable rules - maximizes the resources available for exchanges of new data among scientific leaders, young scientists, and trainees, and facilitates collaboration among investigators at different institutions.

Typically, an NCI scientist attends scientific meetings or visits another research institution to present data about ongoing research or a recently published paper. NCI scientists are integral to the scientific community, and they advance the mission of NCI by participating in broader scientific meetings. The locations of scientific meetings attended by NCI researchers vary widely, both within the United States and overseas. Ultimately, the public will benefit from NCI's participation in these discussions as scientific advances are translated into improved prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer.

HHS and its agencies are specifically authorized to accept sponsored travel by 31 U.S.C. § 1353, which allows acceptance of travel and related expenses from non-Federal sources. All requests for approval of sponsored travel by NCI scientists undergo an extensive analysis and include a review of records maintained in the administration of the government ethics program to ensure that no personal interaction or relationship between the scientist and the sponsoring organization would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of all facts to question the integrity of NCI programs.

Approval is guided by all relevant considerations, including the identity of the non-Federal source; the purpose of the meeting; the identity of other expected participants; the nature and sensitivity of any matter pending at the agency that may affect the interest of the non-Federal source; significance of the employee's role in the matter; and monetary value and character of the travel benefits offered by the non-Federal source. If the analysis of a sponsored travel request suggests any impropriety, the request will be denied.

When sponsored travel is proposed, it is evaluated by the scientist's supervisor, who determines whether the activity is appropriate and supports the NIH and NCI missions. If so, a substantive analysis for conflicts of interest, as described in the HHS Travel Manual, is then conducted by the scientist's supervisor and the NCI Ethics Director. For particularly challenging or complex conflicts analyses, additional reviews may be conducted by the NCI Executive Officer, the NCI Technology Transfer Center, the NIH Ethics Director, or the Office of the DHHS General Counsel.

Generally, sponsored travel is undertaken by intramural scientists, not extramural program officials. In fact, the NCI scientists responsible for awarding extramural grants are not permitted to accept sponsored travel from potential grantee institutions. It is important to note that there is no personal financial gain from sponsored travel: federal law prohibits the employees from receiving honoraria or any personal financial benefit from sponsored travel.

We are concerned that you may have received misinformation about the sponsored travel of NCI scientists, and we appreciate this opportunity to correct the facts. Your letter stated that you had received reports that NCI sponsored travel was "almost exclusively international," and that "the only domestic locations seem to have been California and West Palm Beach, Florida." Our review of the 2008-2010 sponsored travel records for the 16 NCI scientists named in your letter showed that the majority of their sponsored travel was to domestic destinations such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. As detailed in the enclosed spreadsheet, of the 457 total sponsored trips at issue for these 16 NCI scientists over the 2008-2010 timeframe, 57 percent were domestic and 43 percent were foreign. Your letter also referenced a concern about whether NCI is properly reporting sponsored travel to the OGE. All NCI sponsored travel information is collected centrally by the NIH Center for Information Technology and sent to the HHS Program Support Center, Administrative Operations Branch, for review and submission to OGE.

In response to your specific questions:

Questions 1 and 2 - The enclosed spreadsheet includes the following information for each trip taken by the named NCI employees in 2008, 2009, and 2010: the identities of the approving officials; dates; durations; destinations; total costs; names of hotels; classes of travel; names of sponsoring entities; topic(s) of the conferences or meetings; explanations of how the topic(s) of trips relates to duties of the NCI employee and role of the employees at the conferences or host institutions.

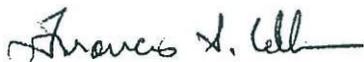
3) The total value of all sponsored travel by the named NCI employees in 2008 was \$466,976; in 2009, it was \$407,474; and in 2010, it was \$309,437.

4) The total expenditures for all government paid travel by the named NCI employees in 2008 was \$84,182; in 2009 it was \$126,416; and in 2010 it was \$77,671.

5) The amount of NCI's appropriation for government paid travel in 2008, 2009, and 2010: NCI does not have a specific appropriation for travel. Any NCI (non-sponsor) funds that were utilized for travel by the 16 NCI employees noted in your letter are reflected in the data provided to address Question 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Again, sponsored travel provides an important opportunity for our scientists to share their work with the broader scientific community. NCI adheres to the HHS approval requirements for sponsored travel in order to maintain the integrity of agency programs and operations.

Sincerely yours,



Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director, National Institutes of Health



Harold E. Varmus, M.D.
Director, National Cancer Institute