

“A Symbol of Our National Concern For the Health of Our People”

Address of Oveta Culp Hobby, Secretary of Health, Education,
and Welfare, in dedication of the Public Health Service
Clinical Center July 2, 1953, at Bethesda, Md.

It is impossible to stand here today without a feeling of tremendous excitement—the excitement one always feels in the face of an infinite potentiality.

In his book entitled “Death Be Not Proud,” John Gunther wrote courageously and beautifully of the gradual death of his son Johnny from a brain tumor. One passage I shall always remember was this: “People may ask if it would not have been better if we had had fewer doctors and less treatment. Perhaps we tried to do too much. But Johnny loved life desperately and we loved him desperately and it was our duty to do absolutely everything and keep him alive as long as possible. Always we thought that, if only we could maintain life somehow, some extraordinary *new* cure might be discovered.”

No human being who has ever loved another human being can fail to understand the urgency that hour by hour, minute by minute, the Gunthers felt as they fought off death for their brilliant, endearing son.

The cure did not come in time for Johnny Gunther nor for tens of thousands of others who have the so-called incurable diseases.

New Solutions Ahead

But with the opening of this Center today, we can envision cures as yet unthought of which will bring life to the desperately ill, which in their hour of need will ease the desperation of parents whose children are as yet unborn.

Each new solution to be found here will mean a new chance at the full and finished life for numberless men, women, and children—each

one a human being who loves life, each one loved by someone else.

The opening of this Center today in no way minimizes the work of the solitary research scientist working alone. It will aid him and the forces of research scattered across the country.

This Center will provide a focal point for all who inquire—for all who seek sources of life and the causes of death.

This is a practical step, taken by our Government as trustee for the people, toward the three-fold goal of improving the health, education, and welfare of our citizens. It will better public health by hastening the conquest of disease; it will widen the bases and the horizons of medical education, and in both these ways it will contribute to the general welfare of the Nation.

A Collaborative Effort

The purpose of the Center—to facilitate and improve medical research—is part of a research program which has gained spectacular impetus since World War II. We are now carrying on in the United States the most intensive and widespread research attack on human disease which the world has ever seen. It is a collaborative effort—a close partnership between the Federal Government and the medical, research, and related professions, universities and medical schools, and numerous nationwide organizations of citizens. Every year the effort widens, as new and old organizations concentrate on specific killers of mankind.

The part played by the Federal Government in this intensive research program is an important one. In fact, half of all research in

medical schools is now financed by the Federal Government. This Department now supports seven research institutes, all of them located at Bethesda. In 1953 Public Health Service grants and related training activities totaled \$22.5 million. This investment has contributed dividends to the kind of medical knowledge which, since 1900, has helped to lengthen our national life span by about 20 years and has taught us how to control or eliminate diseases which once were national scourges.

For example, it was a Public Health Service doctor who discovered that pellagra was a dietary deficiency disease, thus leading to its final conquest. Here, in these Federal research institutes, Rocky Mountain spotted fever was identified and a vaccine against it discovered. Here were made early discoveries about Q fever, and here a vaccine against typhus fever was found, a knowledge which has saved the lives of countless numbers of our troops.

Milestone of Progress

The Clinical Center which we are dedicating today is a milestone—a very big milestone, as you can see—on this road of progress. By this joining, under one roof, of hospital, clinic, and research laboratories, the research scientists are acquiring a new and powerful tool in their endless struggle to unlock the stubborn secrets of disease and build a better life for all of us.

The need for uniting clinical studies more closely with laboratory research was first voiced by the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service as long ago as 1911: "The time has now come when in order to obtain the best results from laboratory work there should be available a hospital attached to the laboratories to which patients suffering from a particular disease which it is desired to study could be admitted, so that the cases could be studied throughout all the stages of the disease." He had the vision, but it has taken 42 years for that vision to materialize into this reality.

Initial funds for building this Clinical Center were finally authorized and the first money appropriated in 1947 by the 80th Congress, and you see the result here today. It is not only a symbol of man's untiring search for knowledge and a better life. It is a monument of

what can be accomplished when there is unity of purpose and free cooperation toward a worthwhile goal.

For the Clinical Center is in no sense a partisan, politically inspired enterprise. Though funds for its construction were voted by a Republican Congress, the vote was on a nonpartisan basis, with both Republicans and Democrats supporting it.

The late beloved Congressman Frank B. Keefe of Wisconsin was its principal champion in the House, and his success in winning nonpartisan support was shown when the measure passed without a single dissenting vote.

In the Senate, Senators Styles Bridges of New Hampshire and William Knowland of California were among its skillful and successful backers. There, too, it won support from both major parties.

The reason for this nonpartisan approach toward the Clinical Center and toward similar measures to improve the Nation's health is not hard to find. For the Center is an instrument in the unceasing search of science for truth, and scientific truth knows no politics—at least in a free society.

A Unique Structure

As you can see, the building itself is a unique structure. Built in the shape of a Lorraine cross, it is really a set of laboratories wrapped around a 500-bed hospital. No more dramatic revelation of the complexity of modern medicine could be devised than the fact that a structure as large and complicated as this is necessary to bring together all the trained doctors and scientists needed for a full-scale attack on the diseases which are being studied here.

The building has been designed to have the utility and flexibility necessary to meet the ever-changing requirements of laboratory research, patient care, and sound administrative practices.

Patients who come here will have medical care as good as any in the world. The most advanced research techniques will probe into the causes and attempt to find ways of curing and preventing the diseases from which they suffer.

This will be far more than simply another

Federal hospital. All its patients will be referred by medical sources and chosen on the basis of their relation to the disease problems currently under study at the Center. They may remain in the hospital for long periods of time, and after they are discharged, they will be observed closely for periods ranging from a few months to 10 years or more. Their welfare will at all times be the first consideration.

A National Institution

The Clinical Center will be a truly national institution—an invaluable asset which will enrich the resources of our universities and medical schools and a laboratory where scientists from other countries can pursue their studies, thus widening not only their own knowledge but ours. But this Clinical Center's meaning, it seems to me, goes deeper than that. It is a logical outcome of the original concept of this country held by the men who founded it.

These men used powerful phrases to express their concept—phrases which are as strong and vigorous today as when first written a century and three-quarters ago.

From the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Will not this Center strengthen human hold on life and make easier the pursuit of happiness?

And from the Constitution, "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity . . ."

What single institution could be expected to do more for the general welfare or to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity?

This Center is the way responsible government—as trustee for the people—fulfills the obligation placed upon it by the Constitution.

It is new evidence that the United States Government continues to be responsive to the people and to the needs of the people.

I proudly dedicate this Center to medical research as a symbol of our national concern for the health of our people, for their right to pursue happiness unhampered by crippling pain and illness.

In freedom, this building and the people who work here are dedicated to the endless struggle against human suffering.

We are dedicating it today—dedicating it to the open mind of research—dedicating it as an example of democracy heeding its obligation to free men, who, together, are self-governing.

Additional Details

. . . concerning Clinical Center operations and policies will be found in three new publications of the Public Health Service.

The National Institutes of Health Clinical Center

Public Health Service Publication No. 316. 1953. 32 pages; illustrated. 10 cents.

The Clinical Center: Current clinical studies and patient referral procedures

Public Health Service Publication No. 284. 1953. 3-fold leaflet.

Handbook for Patients at the Clinical Center
Public Health Service Publication No. 315. 1953. 16 pages; illustrated.

Publication No. 316 is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C. The other publications may be obtained on direct request to the Public Health Service Clinical Center, Bethesda 14, Md.
