AN INVITATION TO READERS

The editors welcome readers' contributions in the form of letters about any aspect of physiology education. Please write to the Editor, Advances in Physiology Education, American Physiological Society, 9650 Rockville Pke, Bethesda, MD 20814–3991.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Physiology Research in Honduras: The Laboratory of Neurophysiology Experience

To the Editor:

The Department of Physiological Sciences in the Faculty of Medicine of the National Autonomous University of Honduras is a very active department. The members of this department have each made contributions to our nation in many ways. Although research had been stalled, it is now alive and starting to pick up speed. Original research is the objective, and the people who do it have pride in their work as they achieve an uphill task that is gradually obtaining the recognition that research has in industrialized countries. “Magnificent stone palaces of the Incas and the pyramids of the Mayas, discovering corn, inventing the number zero, developing agriculture, genetics, astronomy and medicine (living in Honduras), long before many European ethnic civilizations developed it, are giving way to laboratories of modern cities” in Latin America; my country has an internationally recognized agronomic institute for research and academics (1, 4). We have become aware that the foundations of scientific disciplines, despite scarce funds, with the creativity and resourcefulness for overcoming obstacles because we have the same “brain” design as our wealthier neighbors, and these sometimes friendly neighbors contribute many times in the form of collaborations to show us better and faster ways of doing things, thus respecting our culture. Efforts of setting up scientific communities by means of small grant programs are also part of the Latin American experience, where studies of tropical diseases are related to social science health research and even include economic viewpoints (2). My department also is looking into collaborations of this type with the Pan-American Health Organization and the IVIC (a research institute of Venezuela), not to mention collaborations now under way with universities from Costa Rica. Costa Rica and Venezuela each have outstanding high-tech physiological research facilities in collaboration with North America (US and Canadian) and Europe (Switzerland and France). In fact, the Laboratory of Neurophysiology of the Department of Physiological Sciences of Honduras is also establishing collaborations with universities in the USA.
(Tulane University and the University of Arizona), Puerto Rico (University of Ponce), Spain (University of Valencia), and the United Kingdom (University College of London). We are making our own budgets, and we will be able to buy the best available technological equipment for physiological research soon.

Of course, scientists are underpaid even in industrialized countries, but the importance of scientific research becomes more relevant when it focuses on local issues. It is hoped that people will cherish and give greater practical value to the scientist to the point of salary increases for hard work and that this will also increase local funding side-by-side with national and international grants. Nutritional (5) and infectious research are among the most important in public health terms in my country, and physiological research has been headed toward these lines. Latin American researchers also direct their "brain energy" to relevant global issues, such as toxicological-environmental concerns (pesticides and other chemical contamination sources). Even areas like high-temperature superconductivity and the behavior of ion channels in cell membranes are concerns of my department (3, 4).

Research money for basic physiology will come as soon as recognition of our lines of research is established and old equipment shipped from developed nations is replaced with the latest high-tech equipment bought with our own budget or obtained through donations from national or international nonprofit organizations. We do not have to be peripheral arms of research laboratories of developed countries but heads of our research interests, such as Costa Rica, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, and Venezuela are doing. Our vision of what want to become is the frontier determined by our inherent creative thinking. We believe we are able to create a better society of our own nation than what our industrialized friends, from whatever nation, may offer us, achieving at the same time higher standards of living, as demonstrated by the Asian experience.

WINSTON MEJIA
Departamento de Ciencias Fisiologicas
Facultad de Ciencias Medicas
Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Honduras
Apartado Postal 184
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

References