



March 9, 2010

TO: Scientific Management Review Board
Working Group Deliberating Organizational Change
Substance Use, Abuse and Addiction

Dear Review Board Chair and Members of the Subcommittee:

As a former clinician and long time educator in the field of substance use disorders, I am writing this letter from a different perspective than you might have heard in expressing my strong support for a merger of NIAAA and NIDA. A perspective from public reaction, perception and public trust.

I have worked in this field for 25 years, first as a clinician and grant writer and then as an educator to many different audiences. Since 1995, when I started teaching and training on the neuroscience of addiction, I have taught one hour, one day, one week and one semester classes to a myriad of groups including: doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, college students, parents, substance abuse counselors, child welfare workers, law enforcement personnel, policy makers, school personnel and people in recovery to name a few. I feel I have a pulse on the public at large from around the country.

The basis of all my talks, lectures and workshops is to convince people from a scientific perspective that *substance abuse* (to alcohol and other drugs) is a preventable behavior and that *addiction* (to alcohol and other drugs) is a brain disease that is treatable. While this makes completely logical sense to my audiences, I am inevitably asked the question of why then are there two separate federal institutions working on this. I have no satisfactory answer for them from a scientific perspective. It simply makes no logical sense – to the public at large or to myself.

While arguments abound in the scientific communities as to whether alcohol is too unique to merge the institutions, the simple fact is that to the public it appears to lesson the credibility of how research is done creating the perception I've heard for many years: "so it's more about the politics than the science." This is tragic because both institutions conduct important work that benefits humanity in countless ways but only if it is seen by the people these institutions serve as working for the good of the public's health not the good of the institution.

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Lastly, while I agree with those who have expressed concern over the enormity of the task involved in a merger, I also know (having been a part of a large merger within our own institution) that if done with integrity and a well thought out strategic plan the results can be beneficial for everyone.

I strongly feel that by not merging these two institutions while discovering more and more about the science of addiction as a brain disease we are not serving our nation's best interest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Flo Hilliard".

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