

AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION
2004 House of Delegates
Background Report

SUBJECT: Integrity of the Scientific Peer Review Process
(Action Report)

RELEVANT CORE ISSUE: Patient Safety & Advocacy

INTRODUCED BY: Barbara A. Blakeney, MS, APRN,BC, ANP
President, ANA Board of Directors

REFERRED TO: Reference Hearing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Recent efforts to block National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding for research aimed at assessing and reducing health risks among different populations are endangering scientific integrity. Efforts by the Traditional Values Coalition involve creation of a “hit list” of over 150 NIH-funded grants on public health concerns, such as HIV, sexual behaviors and substance abuse. Among this list are several grants funded through the National Institute for Nursing Research (NINR). Additionally there have been recent attacks on NIH funding; these would rescind funding for five specified NIH grants that address significant public health issues, such as reducing risk for HIV and other infectious diseases. Scientific inquiry is being seriously endangered due to a political ideological agenda.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

WHEREAS, The American Nurses Association (ANA) represents registered nurses who not only use the findings of scientific inquiry, but who perform the scientific research needed to expand nursing’s and health care’s body of knowledge; and

WHEREAS, The American Nurses Association represents registered nurses who utilize research findings to care for patient populations, regardless of the patient’s risk-taking behaviors, gender orientation, disease or illness; and

WHEREAS, The health and well-being of clients world-wide are affected by the outputs of the American scientific community; and

WHEREAS, Political scrutiny of scientific research impairs the progress of scientists in the development of cutting edge inquiry; and

WHEREAS, The world community’s trust in the integrity of the American scientific community is based on the gold standard of unbiased scientific peer review of research; therefore, be it

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1 **RESOLVED**, That the American Nurses Association oppose any political or ideological
2 interference in the conduct of rigorous, apolitical peer review of research provided by
3 experts in the respective field of inquiry and the related funding processes; and
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5 **RESOLVED**, That the American Nurses Association support efforts to safeguard the
6 unbiased integrity of the scientific research process; and
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8 **RESOLVED**, That the American Nurses Association oppose any and all attempts to
9 rescind or block funding for health-related research based on philosophical or political
10 considerations or other non-scientific grounds; and
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12 **RESOLVED**, That the American Nurses Association collaborate with the scientific
13 community to protect the integrity of the peer review process.
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16 **REPORT:**

17 Although the intrusion of politics into government sponsored and funded science is always a
18 possibility, the foundation of America's scientific community is currently severely threatened,
19 due to the extent to which partisan political ideology is being forced into the most basic levels of
20 scientific inquiry (<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/24/opinion/24TUES2.html>). For science to
21 progress, peer review processes at all levels of the system must be objective, apolitical, expert,
22 and free of conflict of interest. Peer review structures such as advisory committees for the
23 various Institutes at the National Institutes of Health must be allowed to focus objectively on the
24 science they are being charged to evaluate. Politicization of the review process serves only to
25 discredit the work being done by the scientific community and restricts the development of new
26 knowledge and use of evidence-based practice for the benefit of humankind.
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28 It may be a temptation for those with political clout to attempt to silence ethical and scientific
29 voices that do not support their political agenda. Over the last several years, several advocacy
30 organizations have made public the current administration's efforts to unduly influence the
31 scientific research process. Examples include:

- 32 1) attempting to place ill-prepared individuals on National Institute of Health (NIH)
33 expert panels
34 (http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/method_committees.htm);
- 35 2) questioning a researcher's political ideology prior to the review of her proposal;
36 inquiries by government employees about who a principal investigator voted for in
37 the last national election; and
- 38 3) tampering with the peer review process for political and ideological reasons
39 (http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/example_nih.htm) and
40 (http://www.house.gov/reform/min.politicsandscience/method_research.htm)
41 (Weiss.2004).
- 42 4) proposals seeking funding for sex related topics or projects on AIDS, HIV and sexual
43 orientation are frowned upon and often not funded <http://www.cossa.org/toomey.htm>)

1 and
2 (http://house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/example_reproductive_health.htm).
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4 Nursing researchers are at particular risk if ideological measures are applied, since many nurse
5 researchers study subjects related to reproduction, human sexuality, risk-taking behaviors,
6 psychosocial issues, and vulnerable populations (HIV, AIDS, sexual orientation, and abuse). All
7 of these are areas currently being challenged by conservatives and actively acted upon by the
8 federal government and certain members of the House and Senate. Among study proposals
9 initially blocked before review, were several submitted by nurses. This tampering with research,
10 based not on scientific bases but upon ideological bases, is a major concern for nursing and the
11 Nation.
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13 At the November 2003 annual meeting, the American Academy of Nursing (AAN) issued a
14 “Resolution on Inappropriate Constraints on Research”. Over thirty-five scientific
15 organizations, in addition to AAN, have recently issued statements in defense of peer-reviewed,
16 funded NIH research that has been scrutinized on ideological grounds
17 (<http://www.aaas.org/news/releases/2003/1030nih.shtml>). Politics has no role in the review of
18 science. Research has the potential of impacting people throughout the world who are affected
19 by disease, disability, and the potential to incur such. The need to study these scourges of
20 humanity and their effects on patients must be based on sound scientific principles, not ideology.
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censorship in science. *American Journal of Nursing*, 104 (3) 26.

Past House Action(s): No past House actions specific to this topic.