

January 5, 2015

Dear Chairman Stanley and Members of the NSABB:

I'm writing to express my strong support for the comments submitted by Dr. Mark Lipitsch, which I have read closely and with which I agree in almost every detail. I am very concerned that the continuing gain-of-function research on influenza viruses, and more recently on other viruses, presents extremely serious risks to the public health. As a former influenza researcher myself, I also concur with Dr. Lipitsch and others that the benefits of gain-of-function research are minimal at best. These minimal benefits could easily and far more safely be obtained through other avenues of research.

In addition to my primary research at Hopkins, I also write a popular science blog at Forbes magazine, where I expressed grave concerns about this topic in August 2013, in an article that had over 50,000 hits (see <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stevensalzberg/2013/08/08/scientists-will-create-a-deadly-new-flu-strain-just-to-prove-they-can/>). As I wrote then, it seems clear that some of the scientists leading the GOF research on influenza are doing it primarily for the publicity and acclaim (including publication in high-profile journals), while downplaying the risks. Their primary justification for their work—that lab-created influenza strains will teach us how to avoid or treat future pandemics—has no evidence to support it.

I am pleased that the U.S. government has called for a pause in this research, and I strongly urge you to recommend that this pause become permanent. Continuing research that is intended to make influenza or other viruses more infectious, or more deadly, carries great risks and almost no practical benefits.

Sincerely,



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