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EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE: 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phones: (Area code 202) Central office: 467-4350; Book Reviews: 467-4367; Business Office: 467-4411; Circulation: 467-4417; Guide to Scientific Instruments: 467-4480; News and Comment: 467-4430; Reprints and Permissions: 467-4483; Research Topics: 467-4455; Reviewing: 467-4440. Cable: Advancesci, Washington. Copies of "Instructions for Contributors" can be obtained from the editorial office. See also page xv, *Science*, 26 March 1971. ADVERTISING CORRESPONDENCE: Room 1740, 11 W. 42 St., New York, N.Y. 10036. Phone: 212-PE-6-1858.

Institute of Medicine

Medicine has never been an integral part of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). To correct this lack, it was agreed in August 1970 to form an "Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences." The Institute will not have a separate charter. Its purposes will be to study vital issues related to health and medicine and to report the results to physicians, the public, or both. Studies may be initiated and conducted by the Institute, and proposals may originate in the National Research Council. Requests for study and advice from government or other organizations will be welcomed for consideration.

It is hoped that the membership will be of such quality as to inspire a high degree of confidence in its competence and impartiality. Further, it is hoped that the Institute will help consolidate medical opinion originating with practicing physicians, medical schools, the American Medical Association, specialty societies, and government. Of necessity, the 28 founding members were largely self-elected, and the some 70 more who have been elected will be announced soon. The future membership should climb to about 400.

The Institute is not intended only as an honor. Hence, members will be drawn chiefly from men and women approximately 50 years or younger for a 5-year term, once renewable but terminating at age 66. They will then automatically become "senior members." Before election those proposed must agree to give a substantial amount of working time to the Institute.

About 25 percent of the members will be drawn from those whose activities cover a wide range of disciplines, such as law and economics. The other 75 percent will be selected from those actively involved in some important aspect of health care including nursing, dentistry, medical practice, education, and research. No attempt will be made to secure society or specialty representation; instead, election will be based on demonstrated excellence in a broad range of medical and statesmanlike activity.

Any organization is only as good as its members. The Institute has been exceptionally fortunate in securing Dr. John Hogness, former dean of the University of Washington, Seattle, as its permanent president. He will assume office on 1 August 1971 and will soon recruit a staff. Headquarters will be in the familiar NAS complex in Washington. Initial financial support will come from NAS, but this will be largely replaced by grants and payments for service.

The Institute faces a difficult period. It must maintain its integrity, exhibit courage in its decisions, and willingly undertake study of problems that others prefer to shun. Medicine is teeming with just such sensitive problems. It is hoped that by keeping the Institute relatively small, the heavy hand of bureaucracy and the hegemony of committees will not stifle commingling of individual thinking. It is most important that creativeness not be lost in formalities, puffery, and politics. Statesmanship will be required to keep the Institute from becoming parochial and dominated by cliques.

The Institute of Medicine has a supremely important function to fulfill. It has been structured to become an instrument of the young. It is up to them to make it succeed. If they fail, the Institute should be mercifully disbanded before it obstructs a better organization. If they succeed, the formation of the Institute will have been the greatest organizational step taken in medicine during our lives.—IRVINE P. GE, *Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio*