

**Models of Philanthropic Support for Science:
What is Old, New, Borrowed, and (out of the) Blue?**

Limit my comments to Biological/Life Sciences

- Because that's what I know
- It gets a significant slice of funding
- There are large numbers of disease-related funders supporting research along the spectrum from basic science to clinical medicine
- Has many policy implications from funding decisions to health care reform issues

The strength of American philanthropy, a tradition considered as unusual in the world, has roots deep in American federalism – a distrust of too much centralized power.

Having a large number of funding organizations with diverse decision-makers helps ensure:

- Flourishing of alternative models and approaches that may depart from the common wisdom or challenge the status quo**
- Support for controversial or unpopular topics where gov't is reluctant to tread**
- Nurturing of ideas early in their inception prior to broader acceptance**

Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs (The Filer Commission), *The Third Sector, 1974*

The sector as a whole is most broadly defined by what it is not. It is not government...and it is not business.

...America evidenced a profound tendency to rely on voluntary, nongovernmental organizations to pursue community purposes “from the beginning.”

...private groups and institutions that are deemed to serve the public interest rather than a self-benefiting one.

KINDS OF PRIVATE FUNDERS:

- 1. Privately endowed foundations that fund particular areas of science selected via an analysis of the opportunities best suited to private investment. This might be considered the “social venture capital” model where private funds are invested not for material gain but on behalf of some “common good”. Examples include the James S. McDonnell Foundation; Burroughs Welcome Fund; Gates Foundation**

- 2. Privately endowed foundations focusing on particular disease(s). Often, these foundations are established by families with a connection to a particular disease who believe the mainstream research effort was insufficient or not appropriately focused on treatments.**

Maintaining control, decision-making, and the ability to act flexibly is important to their vision and mission. Even when an analysis reveals it not totally true, most of these organizations believe they are stimulating new ideas or taking “risks”.

Examples are Simons Foundation’s effort in autism research. Goldhirsh Foundation and Sontag Foundation funding for brain cancer.

To some extent they view themselves as “serial partners” with government funders in providing the seed funds needed to help an investigator with a novel idea obtain the preliminary data needed to garner support.

- 3. Voluntary health organizations or disease-specific charities represent a large number of the private funders supporting biomedical research. They usually fill several roles including education and advocacy and represent large constituencies of individuals with a particular disease together with dedicated friends and families.**

In general, these funding organizations raise and disperse funds on an annual basis. Some of these organizations, JDF, ACS, etc have a long history of encouraging research directly via grants, and indirectly via advocacy, education, and increasing awareness. Many successful scientists with significant government funding have, at some time or another, also been grantees of the leading VHOs.

In many cases they were/are founded to assist with the ongoing research effort (the “more” model).

The stereotypical approaches ascribed to disease research support awarded by private funders are linked to biomedical research capacity building:

Broad call for proposals, investigator- initiated, peer-reviewed, usually small grants, targeted at basic biomedical research, and intended for Individuals at various points in career path.

Assumptions behind this strategy include:

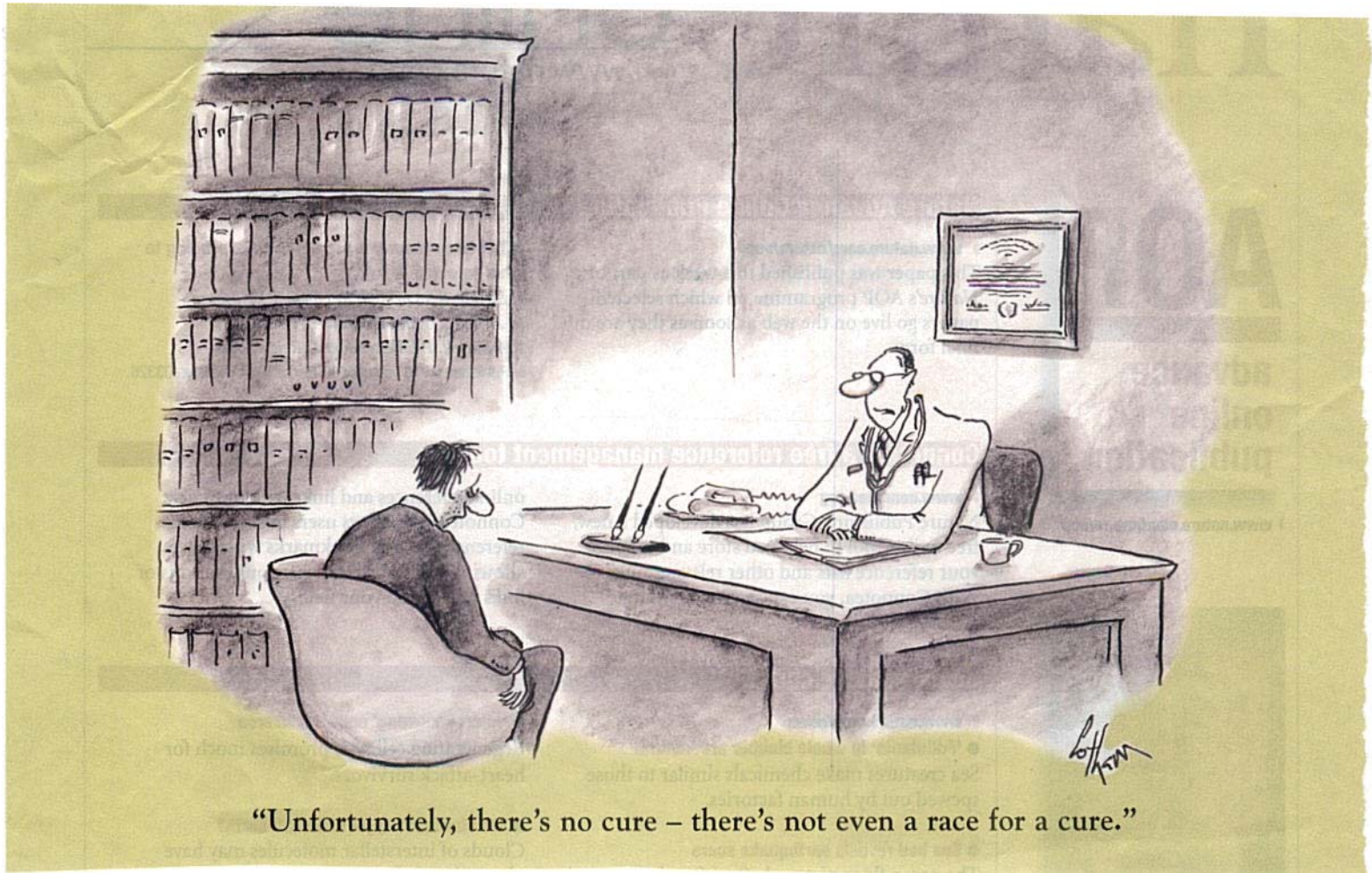
- 1. a belief in the serendipitous nature of scientific discovery**
- 2. understanding causative disease mechanisms are necessary to the development of effective therapies**
- 3. faith in the processes whereby basic science knowledge yields applications.**

WHY INTEREST IN MORE DIRECTED APPROACHES?

Motivated by evidence that a particular disease is ‘falling through the cracks’ or that the pace of the existing research efforts are incommensurate with the urgency of a particular disease.

Funders in this group are influenced by “venture philanthropists” – taking a goal- directed, hands-on approach.

Exerting influence, in a leadership capacity, on the national research agenda is, for these organizations, a critical element of their strategy. Not only do they direct their own research funding - they also actively weigh in on setting government funding priorities.



“Unfortunately, there’s no cure – there’s not even a race for a cure.”

Some models:

Collaborations: Brain Tumor Funders Collaborative; Myelin Repair Foundation

Not for Profit Drug Discovery: Cure Huntington's Disease Initiative;

Controversial Areas such as stem cell research: Children's Neurological Disease Foundation

Clinical Trials: Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation Consortium

Prizes: X Prize Cancer; Prize4Life

Public/Private Partnerships: Gates Foundation/Foundation for the NIH

The directed models often invoke the Manhattan Project; The Apollo Project
The 'get 'er done' approach to solving big problems.

What is unfortunate – is that the creation of a competitive environment is losing us the chance to really test and evaluate alternative models.

Too often, private funders argue about how their model is either “right or wrong” or “better or worse” -- what we really need is to consider them natural philanthropic experiments from which we can learn.

Is a lack of targeted funding is
what is holding up progress?

Are new tools needed? Faster genomics?
Proteomics? Metabolomics?

Is more bio-, info-, nano- technology the key?

Do we need systems with different
rewards/incentives?

Or – are we lacking a theoretical foundation for the
biological sciences and for disease research?

Filer Commission Report Con't

**American philanthropy...assist, and even goad, democratic government...
toward better performance of civic duties and closer attention
to social requirements**

**They are able to stand aside from and criticize state action,
or inaction, in the interest of the inarticulate man in the street.**

**Voluntary organizations...best suited to act as intermediary ... in activities
Involving government and business**

In helping us to consider the question – Who is best suited for the leadership role in convening and brokering private –public partnerships ?

The Filer Commission might have some pertinent advice:

...the voluntary sector should appeal more than ever

...its bedrock grounding in the spirit and political policy of pluralism

...that society benefits from having many different ways for striving to advance the common weal.