

A ♦ R ♦ H ♦ P  
ASSOCIATION OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

November 20, 2003

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Dear Dr. Zerhouni:

We are writing on behalf of the 11,000 core members and professional associates of the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP), an international medical education organization. We strongly support the use of evidence-based science to inform public policy, and applaud the National Institutes of Health's long history of independent peer review and reliance on the time-honored scientific process to conduct research.

We are very concerned about the recent trend of ideology interfering with government agency decision-making, particularly as it relates to research being funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH's scientific research review process, which involves rigorous scrutiny of comprehensive grant applications by expert scientists, has traditionally ensured that only research proposals of the highest scientific merit receive federal funding. Because of this, NIH has been able to supply the medical community with essential data and high-quality medical research that has helped improve the quality of life for people around the world.

ARHP's clinician and researcher members are alarmed by recent attempts by advocacy groups to influence policymakers, potentially blocking NIH-approved and funded research. Scientists are being targeted by these groups—not because of poor quality research but due to ideologically-based objections from the lay community. These researchers are now facing unnecessary scrutiny in which they are forced to justify their NIH approved and funded research. It is essential that the scientists be able to conduct important research that has been endorsed by a rigorous peer-review process without undue government or ideologically-based interference. The reproductive health research community is especially concerned about these developments. Much of the scientific research singled out by advocacy groups is related to reproductive health, including studies about the behaviors of prostitutes, drug users, and other at-risk populations. Such research is critical to the development of effective disease prevention strategies, medical treatments, and public health policies.

We urge the government to respect the integrity of the NIH peer review process and not to allow ideology and politics to impede important scientific research. If you have any questions, please contact Wayne Shields, ARHP's president and CEO at [wshields@arhp.org](mailto:wshields@arhp.org) or (202) 466-3825.

Sincerely,



Felicia Stewart, MD  
ARHP Board Chair  
Director of the Center for Reproductive Health  
Research and Policy  
University of California, San Francisco



Wayne C. Shields  
ARHP President and CEO