

September 25, 2001

President George W. Bush
The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

On behalf of the 115,000 physicians and medical students who are members of the American College of Physicians-American Society for Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM), I am writing to express our deep sadness about the recent terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, and the Pennsylvania area. Our hearts and prayers go out to everyone affected by this horrific tragedy. The sense of unity that Americans have demonstrated in response has truly been this country's finest hour. Unfortunately, the events of September 11 have also demonstrated that the United States is vulnerable to the potential threat of a biological attack, also known as bioterrorism.

The College is deeply concerned about this threat to public health and how unprepared physicians, nurses, and the medical and public health organizations are. Disaster planning for responding to a biologic weapon threat is a serious one that we believe neither the physician community nor the public health structure of the United States is adequately equipped to control.

The planning and training to deal with bioterrorism should involve primary care physicians, as they would be the first line of defense in the event of this type of emergency. Few physicians, however, are currently familiar with the diagnosis and treatment of biological agents. We are increasingly concerned that a bioterrorist attack could result in an epidemic of diseases such as smallpox or anthrax where physicians might fail to correctly diagnose these conditions that are rarely, if ever, encountered. This would result in an epidemic of proportions never seen before. Because internists have extensive experience with infectious disease, they are well prepared to receive the additional training and education needed to deal with this menace. ACP-ASIM has established an online Bioterrorism Resource Center to familiarize physicians with existing sources of information on bioterrorism.

Therefore, ACP-ASIM requests Congress provide adequate levels of funding to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in addition to the amount already allocated for bioterrorism preparedness. These funds would go toward strengthening our local and state public health infrastructures in order to respond to a bioterrorist attack in a quick and efficient way. Further, these funds would be used to educate and train physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals. We propose to work with other health care provider organizations to establish an educated and prepared physician base that is able to diagnose and deal with the health effects resulting from a bioterrorist attack.

The threat of a biological attack on American soil is now a more plausible scenario than ever before. ACP-ASIM is firmly committed to working with Congress and the White House to become an effective defensive force against bioterrorism. We strongly support your commitment to protecting the nation against terrorist attacks and we want to ensure all Americans that the physician community is adequately prepared to deal with this threat as well. Therefore, we urge you to support a sufficient investment in the CDC that is commensurate to the grave risk of threat and the enormous challenge of planning an effective response.

Sincerely,

William J. Hall, MD, FACP
President