

October 25, 2001

Honorable George W. Bush
President
United States of America
The White House
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

The American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM) urges you to designate a physician from within the executive branch of government as the principal spokesperson to the public on the medical and health consequences of bioterrorism. ACP-ASIM is the nation's largest medical specialty society, representing 115,000 physicians who specialize in internal medicine as well as medical students

As the recent incidents of anthrax exposure in Washington, D.C. illustrate, public confidence in the ability of local, state, and federal health officials to deal effectively with a potential bioterrorist incident is undermined when they do not get accurate and timely information from a single authoritative source. Individuals who worked or visited Capitol Hill or worked in Post Office did not know whether, when or how they should be tested for possible anthrax exposure. Different spokespersons provided different accounts of the risk of possible exposure, whether or not the anthrax was "weapons grade", and the necessity of testing for individuals who may have been exposed. Internists nationwide are reporting that patients are asking them to provide them with supplies of antibiotics as a preventive measure against anthrax exposure, even though their physicians know that this will do more harm than good.

Much of the public confusion surrounding the recent anthrax cases is understandable, since we all are learning how to respond to events for which there is no precedent to rely on. But the public is likely to have the greatest degree of confidence in the information that is provided to them on the health consequences of bioterrorism if it comes from a physician from within the Executive Branch. A single physician-spokesperson on the *medical and health consequences* of bioterrorism from would help assure that the public receives the most accurate and current information possible on the health consequences of bioterrorism. We respectfully suggest that the Surgeon General of the United States of America, or the Director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), be considered for this critical role.

Our proposal would support, rather than undermine, the essential roles played by HHS Secretary Thompson and Governor Ridge, director of the Office of Homeland Security. It would help them carry out their responsibilities by allowing them to call on a single physician-spokesperson from the Executive Branch who has the requisite clinical skills to speak authoritatively to the public on all questions relating to the prevention, detection, reporting, and treatment of bioterrorism. Secretary Thompson and Governor Ridge should continue to communicate to the

public the overall response of their agencies to bioterrorism—as they have been doing so effectively—but with the added credibility that will accrue from having your designated physician-spokesperson at their sides to address all health-related questions and concerns from the public.

Thank you for considering this suggestion from America’s internists. We remain committed to working with you to do everything possible to protect the public from bioterrorism, and we commend you for your leadership on this difficult issue. Please let us know how we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

William J. Hall, MD, FACP
President

COPY:

Honorable Tommy Thompson
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services

Honorable Thomas Ridge
Director
Office of Homeland Security