Origins of the NHLBI Program on High Blood Pressure in the Young

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The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) Program on High Blood Pressure in the Young grew out of an awareness by many investigators that adult hypertension may have its origins in adolescence or even in childhood or infancy. Findings from the NHLBI Twin and Offspring Studies suggested that further research into the genetic and environmental influences on blood pressure (BP) variability at younger ages might provide valuable information. Although in 1975 the Institute was supporting many programs for the detection and treatment of hypertension in adults, except for the Specialized Centers of Research, little work was being done in the young to identify the precursors of high BP, especially precursors that might operate or be recognizable at an early age.

This lack of knowledge in an important area prompted the development by NHLBI, in late 1975, of a request for research grant applications. An unexpectedly large number of proposals was received, indicating that the time was ripe for such research emphasis. Many more proposals were approved than could be funded. Dr. Sidney Blumenthal, Director of the Division of Heart and Vascular Diseases at that time, was able to reallocate funds in order to increase the amount of money available so that the Institute was able to fund 16 grants in June, 1976. Subsequently, through the regular grant process and other Institute programs (e.g., the Specialized Centers of Research) further activities designed to elucidate the correlates of arterial pressure in the young and precursors of hypertension received funding.

The original request for grant applications indicated the need for studies of contrasting populations. It should be noted that 12 of the 16 grants deal with both black and white groups, one with Spanish-Americans, and one with Polynesians. Most of the projects address more than one of the relevant topics, including genetic influences, tracking, toxemia, growth and development, diet, and psychological factors.

Grantees presented a 1-day work-in-progress symposium in Cleveland at the conclusion of the 1979 Annual Meeting of the American Heart Association's Council for High Blood Pressure Research. Topics discussed included: standardization, genetic influences, environmental influences, correlates of arterial pressures, long-term significance, and hypertension in pregnancy. This supplement to Hypertension contains manuscripts of the investigators who participated in that symposium. We anticipate this document will be of interest to researchers by identifying new research avenues, and also of interest to practicing physicians by providing state-of-the-art knowledge necessary for interpreting and responding appropriately to relatively high BP measurements in patients.
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