

THE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE CONCEPT

Michael E. DeBakey

The inauguration of the *journal of the Methodist DeBakey Heart Center* deserves high praise, and Dr. William Winters deserves our commendation for initiating this effort. I am deeply appreciative of his kindness in dedicating this inaugural issue to me and in inviting me to submit a statement.

The Methodist DeBakey Heart Center has a long and prolific legacy as a Cardiovascular Research Center extending over four decades. In 1960, I had the opportunity to present the Center concept to U.S. Senator Lister Hill, who was then Chairman of both the U.S. Senate Legislative and Appropriations Committees concerned with health. He asked me how I would define a cardiovascular center. The definition I gave him, I believe, still applies, and it may be appropriate to quote it:

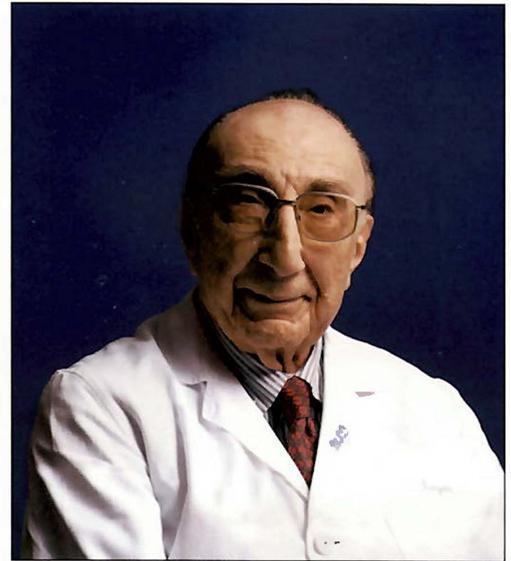
A Cardiovascular Research and Training Center is an organizational unit established for the specific purpose of advancing knowledge and developing the most effective techniques and methods for the clinical management and prevention of cardiovascular disease through research, teaching, and patient care.

Strongly oriented toward the problem of human disease, with the primary focus on the patient, the Center should be provided with all the resources, facilities and personnel essential to modern biomedical research and the conduct of the most sophisticated diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. Since the Center will be concerned with the total spectrum

of cardiovascular disease problems, whose solutions will require the collaborative skills and talents of scientists from the various disciplines, it must be staffed by a corps of scientists representing the biological, engineering, physical, and social sciences, as well as the clinical disciplines.

The Center should be housed in a discrete geographic area to permit staff members to work in sufficiently close proximity with one another, and with sufficient integration of their activities, in order that ideas and technical advances can be continuously exchanged and critically evaluated and research opportunities immediately recognized and exploited. The Center provides for the most effective interface between the fundamental sciences and clinical investigation, and thereby permits the rapid advancement and application of knowledge derived from the various scientific disciplines toward the solution of cardiovascular problems. The Center should provide for the most favorable environment for attracting high-quality trainees in a wide spectrum of clinical and fundamental scientific disciplines, and for training and equipping them with the most advanced skills and techniques of current biomedical research and clinical cardiovascular investigations.

As incorporated in this definition, there is a need for continuous interchange and rapid diffusion of information and knowledge gained from the research endeavors of the different clinical and basic scientific disciplines. This is best



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achieved by regularly scheduled scientific meetings and publications. The latter can be well served by the new quarterly *journal of the Methodist DeBakey Heart Center*. As Lord Chesterfield stated in one of his letters to his son in 1789:

"Next to doing things that deserve to be written, there is nothing that gets a man more credit, or gives him more pleasure, than to write things that deserve to be read."