

Fredericksburg, Va., 22401
July 31, 1992

Bernadine F. Healy, Director
National Institutes of Health

Bethesda, Maryland, 20892

Dear Ms. Healy:

My brother, John Keith Coder, flew helicopter rescue missions in Viet Nam in 1969-70 out of Da Nang. At some point he came into contact with Agent Orange and was diagnosed in the late 1980's with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

In January, 1992, he was accepted into a program at N.I.H. Although he lived in Des Moines, Iowa, he came to Bethesda every few weeks for treatment. He last came to N.I.H. on June 24. He never left. He died on July 17, 1992. The treatments enabled him to live long enough to see his older daughter graduate from high school and his younger daughter pitch in some summer soft ball games. And, perhaps, his experience at N.I. H. will help others live longer or be cured.

I wanted to let you know that everyone was friendly and helpful to him, his wife and also my husband and I when we visited. I can't say enough good things about his doctors, the medical team assigned to him and other professionals with whom he came into contact. The janitorial, food and other hospital personnel were also very pleasant. Please pass these compliments on to them.

I am sending copies of this letter to several senators in hopes that they will give your organization more funds in future years.

I do have several criticisms, one of which deserves a big apology to my sister-in-law.

I would suggest that someone clean out the air conditioning/heating vents in the isolation section on 13 west. John had to have minor lung surgery and had to be moved to a different room because of the gunk/crud in the vents. I imagine all of the rooms are like that. That is not healthy. Also, after this operation, the unused supplies were left in the room at least for a week and may have been there when he died. I realize that because of budget cuts, you probably don't have enough personnel for clean-ups, but it was disconcerting to see a lot of unnecessary supplies in his room.

My sister-in-law had wanted John to be buried wearing his wedding ring. The ring did not arrive until the day after the funeral (July 23) and arrived then only because a family friend called N.I.H. after the burial (July 22) and demanded its return. During a discussion of this, I learned that apparently we were lucky to have John back for the funeral and burial. There had been some doubt about getting his body back. Death creates enough stress and sadness without having to play games with N.I.H. I hope whoever is responsible does not do this to another family. An apology about the ring can be sent to my sister-in-law. Her name and address are: Sydne Coder, , Des Moines, Iowa, 50322.

Now reread the complimentary portion of this letter again so that this will not end on a totally sour note.

Sincerely,

Ruth Coder Fitzgerald

Copies to: Senators John Warner and Charles Robb, Virginia; Senators Tom Harkin and Charles Grassley, Iowa; Senator Bob Kerrey, Nebraska; Senators Barbara Mikulski and Paul Sarbanes, Maryland.