

*ISI's Press Digest Helps Narrow the Gap
Between the Scientist and the Layman*

May 16, 1973

This issue of *Current Contents* contains our first *Press Digest* of articles from popular magazines and newspapers that scientists should know about.

Recently,¹ I proposed a basic-science lobby to reverse current cutbacks in research funding -- the inevitable result of inadequate communication between scientists and laymen. The public's failure to exert pressure on elected officials for expanded research followed.

A science lobby cannot be successful if it relies solely on contacts with politicians. A proper lobby must be supported by informed public opinion. Public opinion is molded by the communications media. The media are in turn largely affected by the periodical press. An effective job can't be done unless scientists appreciate current public opinion

and how it has developed. We need to promote, not only the public's understanding of science, but also science's understanding of the public.

Scientists too often have assumed that their work needs no public justification or explanation. Too many scientists feel that "public relations" is not only a waste of time, but also a kind of blasphemous malpractice alien to professionalism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In discussing the increasing involvement of the "laity" in medical decision-making,² I stated that the physician will have to devote more time to explaining his methods and goals. The same holds true for scientists. In helping to establish priorities in an information-conscious society, we can no longer afford to speak solely to and among ourselves.

The intelligent layman demands answers to questions in language he can understand.

Since so few scientists write intelligibly, the professional science writer or reporter is an important intermediary between the scientist and the taxpayer. It is vital that we be aware of how he represents us to the public. And when the science writer does his job well, his output can be very useful to us.

The CC® *Press Digest* will call attention to well-written articles which can help in communicating with students, laymen, and relatives. Am I unique in finding it difficult to explain my research to my family?

You may find that the *Press Digest* calls attention to every field but your own. Hopefully that will generate a healthy and constructive envy, leading to corrective action by you or some

member of your nearest "invisible" college.

CC's Press Digest will report articles you'll want to recommend, but also some you may wish were never printed. A press clipping service must tell it as it is! I invite your comments and will appreciate clippings overlooked in a necessarily limited reading list shared by me and my staff.

1. Garfield, E. We need a lobby for basic research, here's how it might be done. *Current Contents* No. 11, 14 March 1973, p. 5-7.
2. ----- A growth in biomedical literacy is changing the doctor-patient relationship. *Current Contents* No. 14, 4 April 1973, p. 5-7.