

## IGES Resolution Concerning Recent Allegations Against James V. Neel

The following resolution was passed unanimously by the International Genetic Epidemiology Society (IGES) Board of Directors; by the IGES Committee on Ethical, Legal, and Social Issues; and by all members of the society present at the business meeting of the Society's Annual Meeting in San Antonio, TX, October 28, 2000.

During recent weeks, there have been several articles and voluminous activity over the Internet about alleged misconduct of scientists headed by James V. Neel [Mann, 2000], an eminent human geneticist who died earlier this year. The *Guardian Weekly* carried the most sensational headline, "U.S. Scientist Brought Death to the Amazon" [Brown, 2000]. If true, such allegations would constitute grievous breaches of human rights and professional ethics. Although these accusations come from a book by the freelance journalist Patrick Tierney, to be published in mid-November [Tierney, 2000a], there is preliminary testimony in an article by the same journalist in *The New Yorker* [Tierney, 2000b]. An in-depth review and assessment of the allegations must await publication of the book.

The rights of research subjects are paramount in research dealing with human subjects, but scientists also have the right not to be the subjects of reckless or unsupported accusations. Dr. Neel was one of the most eminent human geneticists of his generation, an early President of the American Society of Human Genetics, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the first President of the IGES, and the exemplar we commemorate with the IGES James V. Neel Young Investigator Award. Allegations that attribute unethical actions to distinguished scholars in their field require a fair and proper review by scientists and ethicists. The IGES considers this issue very important because of the crucial role of the rights of human research subjects. With respect to the allegations made public thus far in *The New Yorker* article [Tierney, 2000b], there is sufficient evidence [Neel et al., 1970; Neel, 1994; Crenson, 2000; Ridley, 2000; Zalewski, 2000; web sites, 2000] to substantially refute these charges. The IGES Board of Directors fully intends to continue the review process through its Ethical, Legal, and Social Issues Committee.

### REFERENCES

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