



Office of  
Alumni Relations

***Sent on behalf of President Ronald Daniels, Dean Paul Rothman,  
and Dean Michael Klag***

Dear Member of the Johns Hopkins Community:

More than 60 years ago, the U.S. government conducted an unconscionable and unethical experiment in Guatemala, in which U.S. government researchers deliberately infected vulnerable citizens of Guatemala with syphilis and other infectious diseases. We feel profound sympathy for the individuals and families impacted by this deplorable study.

When the details of this study came to light, a Presidential Commission determined that the Guatemala Study was funded and conducted by the United States Government. In 2010, the President of the United States, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Health and Human Services apologized to all affected. In 2012, a federal district court concluded that the pleas of victims for relief are more appropriately directed to the political branches of the federal government.

Today, attorneys representing Guatemalan plaintiffs announced that they are suing The Johns Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins Health System, alleging that Johns Hopkins was responsible for the study. The plaintiffs' essential claim in this case is that prominent Johns Hopkins faculty members' participation on a government committee that reviewed funding applications was tantamount to conducting the research itself, and therefore that Johns Hopkins should be held liable.

Neither assertion is true.

This was not a Johns Hopkins study. Johns Hopkins did not initiate, pay for, direct or conduct the study in Guatemala. Participation in the review of government research was then and is today separate from being a Johns Hopkins employee, and no nonprofit university or hospital has ever been held liable for a study conducted by the U.S. Government.

As a leading global research university, Johns Hopkins values rigorous and open scrutiny of history, even when it is complex and uncomfortable.

We know that historians have previously linked prominent Johns Hopkins faculty members in various ways to other unethical government research studies in Tuskegee and Terre Haute. Although separate from the Guatemala lawsuit, these studies were all deplorable and all demand reflection upon the broader legacy of unethical research. It is important to confront and learn from the past. At the same time, we cannot let unfounded allegations go unchallenged. We will defend the institution vigorously in court against legal responsibility for the government's Guatemala study.

If you would like more information about the university's position on the lawsuit, we have released a media statement that you can find [here](#), along with information about the Presidential Commission on the research in Guatemala and its findings.

Sincerely,

Ronald J. Daniels  
President, The Johns Hopkins University

Paul B. Rothman, M.D.  
Dean of the Medical Faculty  
CEO, Johns Hopkins Medicine

Michael J. Klag, M.D., M.P.H.  
Dean, The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

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