



July 2004

An Open Letter to the Community about the Research at the Biosafety Laboratory at Boston University Medical Center

In September 2003, Boston University Medical Center (BUMC) was awarded \$128 million by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), to build a biosafety laboratory. The Biosafety Laboratory at BUMC will serve as part of a national network of university-based researchers and laboratories whose goals are to develop vaccines, diagnostics and treatments against emerging infectious diseases whether they occur naturally or are deliberately introduced through bioterrorism.

Questions have been raised about the type of research that will be conducted as part of this national effort at BUMC's Biosafety laboratory. This letter serves to reinforce our position on the nature of the research that will take place.

First and foremost, Boston University Medical Center only conducts biomedical research that is in the best interests of the public's health. Boston University Medical Center will own, manage and operate the Biosafety Laboratory. This means that prior to initiation of any research project the proposed research is reviewed by standing committees that examine the proposed research for appropriateness and safety. These committees, such as the Institutional Biosafety Committee, have community representatives who participate in the review. Full disclosure of the research project to the scientific and community reviewers is required. Minutes of the meetings are available to the public. No secret research is permitted.

The Biosafety Laboratory at BUMC will be supported by grants from the NIH. The sole purpose of research conducted under NIH sponsorship is to promote improved health for the American people. The NIH does not fund classified or secret research. The NIH and BUMC support the policy of encouraging publication and dissemination of research findings through appropriate scientific channels. All research at the Biosafety Laboratory at BUMC will be peer reviewed. BUMC is not supporting any secret or "classified" research, and, we have no plans to do so. It is important to emphasize that our work will not include any research on bioweapons. Bioweapons research is illegal. Our mission is research to improve human health.

We hope this letter helps clarify our position on the nature of the research proposed at the Biosafety Laboratory at Boston University Medical Center. Additional information, including a listing of proposed research projects to combat emerging infectious diseases, is available for review at the Boston, Roxbury, Dorchester and South End branches of the Boston Public Library.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Richard J. Towle".

Richard J. Towle
Senior Vice President
Boston University