

Deborah Waroff's Letter to Nath: publicly posted on Facebook

Deborah Waroff

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EARLY MORNING COMMUNIQUE TO DR. NATH

Deborah Waroff

New York City

8th November, 2016

Dr. Avindra Nath

Clinical Director

NINDS, Bethesda

Dear Dr. Nath,

I have studied your c.v and bibliography, and of course I am impressed. It is clear that you are capable of brilliant work, leading to original discoveries. I sincerely hope you will be able to apply your talents to Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME/cfs,) as your HIV-AIDS investigations show important parallels to puzzles in this disease.

In light of your considerable promise, I am very concerned that Dr. Walitt has put you in the dreadful position of being the person looked to as responsible for the appearance of Edward Shorter to lecture on the history of ME/cfs at NIH. Perhaps he is not able to appreciate such situations -- I hear that he has acted bizarre and unreliable in other capacities of late, though perhaps not in your purview.

More important, Dr. Walitt has previously publicized his overwhelming preference for a somatic verdict on ME, notwithstanding a literature of 5,000 peer-reviewed papers documenting that the somatic/psychological interpretation is garbage.

Certainly the recent thorough debunk of the PACE Trial, following the null result of the FINE trial, has put paid to such views among people who deal in fact and evidence. Of course Dr. Walitt is entitled to worship whatever false idols he chooses – our Constitution guarantees this freedom. However the Constitution does not provide the right to hijack the scientific research of NINDS, nor to taint your reputation with a basting of fantastical superstition.

Shorter is without doubt the least accurate historian I have ever encountered. Normally historians err due to mistakes in or misinterpretations of primary sources. Not Shorter. He just makes stuff up.

Shorter is also the most vituperative, poisonous bully to emerge in science journalism in my lifetime. Nothing limits his cruelty, as reality might limit most persons,' because whatever damning data he might wish to employ in an assault he will simply invent. He fabricates his poisons out of thin air, without any regard for researching and referencing facts.

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Link to FB post: <https://www.facebook.com/deborah.waroff/posts/10154416318798941>

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Let me provide you an example of Shorter's fantasy-derived historiography, which comes from material quite outside of ME/cfs, so that you can see the problem is his generally, not one of ME/cfs specifically:

The whole diagnosis (of PTSD) resulted from a systematic campaign of the Vietnam veterans in the late 1970s, and as a political construct PTSD has little place in a scientific classification of disease.

This fits the Shorter paradigm – disease as a mere artifact of cultural nonsense. But it doesn't fit the facts. The phenomenon of PTSD was described in Greek battle by Herodotus. World War I saw "shell shock." The boys came back from World War II with "Combat Stress Reaction," or plain old "battle fatigue." Now modern technology lays bare aspects of PTSD in veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Also, please note that neither the first clause of Shorter's sentence ("The whole diagnosis.....) nor the second clause (as a political construct.....) is true.

Dr. Nath, the above travesty of historiography represents a mere appetizer. You will not believe your eyes when you read Shorter's essay "Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Is Back!," which appeared in Psychology Today in February, 2015. I have reproduced it in pdf format and attached to this email. I had to obtain this, the original essay, from the Wayback Machine, because Psychology Today was so horrified by the articles reception and critical commentary that they pulled this version from the web and replaced it with a nearly sanitized version.

In this article Shorter does not get the most basic facts right. No, Ed Shorter, the IOM was not captured by patients. It was contracted for by the NIH.

No, CFS did not come out of any so-called "brew" from the 1970s as Shorter fabricates. In fact, that is one of the least eventful decades in ME/cfs history. Actually, ME emerged as a fellow-traveller to Poliomyelitis at the end of the 19th century. Enteroviruses figure large in its history, but other pathogens will do.

Dates of consequence for ME include 1934 (L.A. Hospital Outbreak), 1955 (Royal Free Outbreak), 1956 (name Myalgic Encephalomyelitis bestowed in BMJ editorial),

1969 (WHO lists ME under Neurological Diseases at 93.3 in the ICD), 1984-85 (the winter of an outbreak at Incline Village, Lake Tahoe, Nevada), 1986 (CDC investigators visit but skip most epidemiological procedures), 1987 (Harvard's Dana Farber publishes research showing depressed activity in NK cells of Tahoe patients) 1988 (Holmes Report; re-Christen's Tahoe disease "Chronic Fatigue Syndrome," although experts had recognized it as ME, but eliminated neurological phenomenon like seizures and the published immune abnormalities from criteria.)

I could write pages on Shorter's errors. More on his hideous venom. But the comments to the story made by magazine readers say quite enough.

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This is no freedom of speech question. To bring Shorter to NIH using taxpayer money, to give him an audience working for the US government, and to do so in a building belonging to the American people, sanctifies his vileness and hate. It gives him the NIH stamp of approval and prestige. And it educates NIH scientists in how to mistreat patients and follow entirely the wrong lines of enquiry in their research? Why on earth would you want to do that?

I can see some difficulty in canceling Shorter outright. But certainly you must postpone him. For one thing, Washington may well be in lockdown on the 9th. Reagan Airport may be closed. This is an unusually volatile election. I think it only reasonable to put off his visit until things have settled down.

However, I do applaud your idea of introducing history to the research context, and am quite happy to offer suggestions of a well-rounded group of two or three persons well-versed in ME/cfs history to join Shorter on the stage or at the lectern. I think they may well make mincemeat of him. But he simply cannot be allowed to reign alone.

Yours sincerely,

Deborah Waroff

1 Shorter, Edward. "An Alternative, History-Based, Nosology for Psychiatry" H-Madness, A blog following the history of

psychiatry. July 30, 2013 Internet publication.

2 J Immunol. 1987 Nov 15;139(10):3306-13.

Phenotypic and functional deficiency of natural killer cells in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome.

Caligiuri M1, Murray C, Buchwald D, Levine H, Cheney P, Peterson D, Komaroff AL, Ritz J.