



# COLLEGIUM RAMAZZINI

## INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Castello dei Pio  
41012 Carpi / Modena / Italy

## GENERAL SECRETARIAT

Castello di Bentivoglio  
Via Saliceto, 3  
40010 Bentivoglio / Bologna / Italy  
Telephone 39 051 6640650 - Fax 39 051 6640223  
E-mail: collegium@ramazzini.it

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Belgium

SECRETARY GENERAL  
MORANDO SOFFRITTI

General Secretariat  
Collegium Ramazzini  
Castello di Bentivoglio  
Via Saliceto, 3  
40010 Bentivoglio, Bologna, Italy  
Tel. 39 051 6640460 - 6640650  
Fax 39 051 6640223  
E-mail: crcf@ramazzini.it

November 13, 2006

The Honorable Fredrik Reinfeldt  
Prime Minister of Sweden  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Rosenbad 4  
SE-103 33, Stockholm  
SWEDEN

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

We write this letter on the topic of occupational health and safety research in Sweden on behalf of the Collegium Ramazzini, an international scientific society that examines critical issues in occupational safety and environmental health. The Collegium is a society dedicated to the prevention of disease and the promotion of health in nations worldwide. The Collegium derives its name from Bernardino Ramazzini, Professor of Medicine in the Universities of Modena and Padua in the late 1600s and early 1700s, who is considered the "father of occupational medicine." The Collegium Ramazzini is comprised of 180 physicians and scientists from 35 nations. Each of these Fellows of the Collegium Ramazzini is a leader in his or her home country, and each is elected through a rigorously selective process that is designed to ensure that only the world's leading scientists and physicians are Fellows of this very special College. Among the Fellows of the Collegium Ramazzini are a number of Sweden's preeminent scientists, and several have received the organization's highest honor, the Ramazzini Award. In 2006, Dr. Anders Englund of Sweden was recognized by the Collegium with the presentation of this prestigious Award in recognition of his lifelong contributions to protecting the health of workers in the construction sector and to the prevention of cancer in the broader society.

The Collegium Ramazzini has great admiration for the contributions to the health of workers in Sweden and in nations around the world that have been made by Sweden's occupational safety and health research community. These contributions have



truly been enormous. They have reached the world thorough Swedish researchers generously sharing their knowledge and expertise. The Swedish research in occupational safety and health is recognized to be of extremely high quality and reliability, and the World has come to look towards Sweden for guidance, support and assistance.

On 28 October 2006, during the annual meeting of the Council of Fellows of the Collegium Ramazzini in Carpi, Italy, the birthplace of Bernardino Ramazzini, the Colegium adopted a resolution to send this letter to the Government of Sweden concerning the future direction of occupational safety and health research in Sweden. This letter responds to our understanding that it is the intent of the Government to reorganize occupational safety and health research effective July 1, including possibly the closure of the National Institute for Working Life (NIWL). The Collegium urges the Government to take into account two essential concerns as it considers this matter:

- Recognize the very great significance of Sweden's international impact in the field of occupational safety and health research and find ways to maintain this impact. The global importance of Sweden's contributions was expressed equally by scientists from developed as well as from developing regions of the World. Sweden's contributions to occupational safety and health have brought great honor, respect and acclaim to Sweden from physicians and scientists worldwide.
- Maintain some kind of central organization within Sweden that can coordinate, prioritize and direct the work of the occupational safety and health research community. Virtually every Fellow of the Collegium Ramazzini - whether from academia, government, non-governmental organization or international organization - strongly expressed the view that to maximize the impact of the Swedish work in occupational health and safety, such a National Center is absolutely essential.

#### **The Importance of Sweden's Occupational Safety Health Research to the World.**

Sweden's occupational safety and health community has been central to the development of knowledge about the risks that workers face in their places of employment as a result of being exposed to safety, physical and toxic hazards. As a result of this research, millions of workers around the World no longer die





prematurely or become disabled. Among the contributions of Sweden's researchers, the Collegium wishes to emphasize the following remarkable highlights:

- Quantification of the cancer risk that results exposure to radiation from a variety of natural and man-made sources.
- Discovery of the neurological risks of solvents. As a result of these findings, paints today are mostly water-based and solvent exposure is greatly reduced.
- Recognition of the cancer and pulmonary risks of asbestos to workers and consumers. As a result, Sweden has led the World towards what is becoming a global ban of the use of asbestos and the safe handling of asbestos already in place.
- Discovery of the musculoskeletal risks of manual handling of heavy loads, working in repetitive tasks and in awkward postures. As a result, the adoption of ergonomic design has become widely accepted in all phases of life, and workers' productivity has been substantially enhanced.
- Discovery of the psycho-social and psychological risks from overwork and poorly developed interpersonal relationships in workplaces and the community.
- Definition of the economic value of designing workplaces to enhance safety and health. As a result, it is now widely understood that occupational safety and health precautions not only act to protect workers, but they are also essential prerequisites of high quality performance and productivity.

**Prerequisites for Maintaining a Vibrant Research Community.** In their deliberations, the members of the Collegium Ramazzini stressed certain criteria for maintaining a strong national research resource in occupational safety and health in Sweden. These include strong professional leadership, a central organization to set priorities and give direction to the research community, and centers of excellence that train new generations of professionals and conduct independent research.

We cannot emphasize enough that a National Center is essential to maintaining a national resource. Without such a Center, a nation cannot maintain the critical mass needed to develop research and communicate its findings nationally and



internationally. Occupational safety and health is comprised of a large number of different professions, including safety engineering, behavioral sciences, medical evaluation and statistical analysis. There is great synergy between these professions, which generates great research productivity when organized well. This too requires the presence of some kind of National Center.

As the World becomes increasingly interdependent, a National Center is needed to provide leadership, stature and presence. Most immediately this is evident within the European Union, where Sweden is clearly a leader in our field. The opportunity that this provides to represent Sweden's interests and values is readily evident. We cannot stress enough how much the World looks to Sweden and its National Institute for guidance.

The Collegium Ramazzini wishes to congratulate the Swedish people and their Government for having developed this resource over the past half century and to emphasize its significance to the World. It is vitally important to continue to foster it in the future. While much has been accomplished in occupational safety and health over the past fifty years, much still needs to be done. As the Government deliberates the future organization of occupational safety and health research, training and communication, we hope it will take into consideration how much the Global community has come to look to Sweden, and we hope the Government will continue to provide occupational safety and health with the resources and visibility that is required to maintain this leadership position.

With gratitude for Sweden's past contributions to our field, the Collegium respectfully urges the Government to find ways to make even greater contributions in the future.

FOR THE COLLEGIUM RAMAZZINI

Philip J. Landrigan, MD, MSc  
Chairman  
Department of Community  
and Preventive Medicine  
Mount Sinai School of Medicine  
New York, NY, USA

Morando Soffritti, MD  
Scientific Director  
European Ramazzini Foundation  
of Oncology and Environmental  
Sciences  
Bentivoglio, Bologna, Italy