FOREWORD

NEARLY all of us alive today are witnesses to the miracles of modern prescription drugs—the infection-fighting antibiotics, the steroid hormones to control arthritis and fertility, the psychoactive agents that influence the mind, and a host of others. Many of us *are* alive today because of those miracles.

Where these drugs are applied rationally, much credit must go to the scientists who discovered them, the drug industry that produced them, and the physicians who prescribe them.

But too often, the drugs are misrepresented, misprescribed and misused. The result has been a growing loss of confidence in the drug industry. Far more significant, there has been a loss of confidence in the ability of physicians to prescribe in the best interest of their patients. There is mounting indignation among physicians and patients alike who see the AMA and other medical organizations making themselves financially beholden to the drug companies.

Now something new has been added. Now there is evidence that irrational and misguided drug use involves more than the annual waste of hundreds of millions of dollars; it harms people, it puts many of them in hospitals—and some in coffins.

The price for all this waste of money and needless injury must be paid by the public as patients, and as consumers who pay premiums for health insurance.

The issues involved will not be decided easily, quickly, or comfortably. Some hallowed medical traditions must be questioned and some ancient practices curtailed. The needs of stockholders must be weighed

against those of patients and consumers. At the same time, the present need of the public for safe, effective drugs at reasonable cost must be measured against the needs of future citizens for new drugs even better than those we possess today, and the research functions of the drug industry must not be crippled.

In the entire field of medicine, there are few subjects so vital to the health and even the lives of patients. Few so urgently call for action by an informed public.

And few authors are so well qualified to shed light on the subject as the authors of *Pills, Profits, and Politics*. For nearly twenty years, Milton Silverman and Philip Lee have been closely associated as patient and physician, as co-workers in the federal government and in university posts, as personal friends and now as co-authors.

Dr. Silverman is not only a distinguished science writer but also a trained scientist. Dr. Lee has had a notable career as family physician and medical leader. They bring together a most unusual combination of training, experience, and knowledge in the private practice of medicine, biomedical research, the planning and implementation of health policy at the highest levels of government, the background of the drug industry, and the politics of organized medicine. They share a driving interest in the quality of health care.

Pills, Profits, and Politics will quite possibly stir controversy. Drs. Silverman and Lee have emphatic views. Others may disagree, but the views expressed here deserve to be heard. The book is intended to outline a serious problem to the public and to indicate the options that are open.

John W. Gardner

Washington, D.C., February 1974