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JOINT COMMITTEE ON ATOMIC ENERGY
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

October 24, 1964

MEMORANDUM

To: All Committee Members

From: ^{EDB}_{FOR} John T. Conway, Executive Director

Subject: Thyroid Cancer in Marshallese Children

The attached AEC letter dated October 19, 1964, informs the Committee of a recent development concerning the health of the Marshallese exposed to fallout from the March 1, 1954, thermonuclear test at Bikini.

This year's annual survey disclosed three cases of children suspected of having thyroid cancer. In two cases, thyroids were removed and the diagnosis confirmed. The third child will be operated upon in the near future. It may be necessary in these cases to administer therapeutic medications to compensate for removal of the thyroid.

Cancer of the thyroid is a relatively rare form of cancer. The spontaneous occurrence of three cases among such a small number of children is unlikely.

Thyroid cancer can be induced by radiation but data on this are scarce. The radiation dose to the thyroids of the Marshallese due to the 1954 fallout is estimated at 200 to 300 rads.

The Commission believes it desirable to consider the above information tentative until medical documentation of these cases is in hand.

Attachment:

Cpy of AEC ltr of 10/19/64
Dunham to Conway

25,128 JCAE
Box 712 General (no residence)
Bikini, Atoll

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UNITED STATES
ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION
Washington, D. C. 20545

October 19, 1964

Mr. John T. Conway
Executive Director
Joint Committee on Atomic Energy
Congress of the United States

Dear Mr. Conway:

During the February 1964 annual medical survey of the Marshallese Islanders exposed to fallout from the March 1, 1954, shot over Bikini, three young teenagers, 13-14 years old, were found to have nodules in their thyroid glands. The medical team felt that two of them should have immediate thyroidectomies, and these operations were successfully carried out at the Naval Hospital on Guam with the full cooperation of the Trust Territory people and the medical services of the Department of Defense.

The pathological diagnoses were papillary adenocarcinoma, a malignant tumor of the thyroid. The prognosis, of course, is uncertain, but the surgeons are reported to have felt that they may have removed all the neoplastic tissue. While this information has not been transmitted formally, it is regarded as reliable. It is planned that a ten year summary of the health status of the exposed Marshallese, including these recent developments, will be prepared for prompt publication in a prominent journal such as the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Preparations are now going ahead to have the third child with a small nodule operated on as soon as possible. The estimated doses to these thyroids are some 100 to 175 rads external gamma plus 100 to 150 rads from absorbed radioiodine.

Since the spontaneous occurrence of two, and possibly three, cases of thyroid neoplasm among the small number of exposed Marshallese children is most unlikely, these observations will probably give rise to comment in various quarters. For this reason, it seems desirable to consider this matter as tentative until the documented data are in hand.

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Mr. John T. Conway

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For your further information, Dr. Robert A. Conard of the Brookhaven National Laboratory, who has been following the health of the Rongelap people on behalf of the Atomic Energy Commission, is leaving for the Trust Territory on October 26 at which time he will review the medical data and confer with the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory. When we have more definitive information available we will provide it to you.

Enclosed are copies of some relevant correspondence from the Trust Territory people as well as a copy of Drs. Conard and Hicking's Preliminary statement concerning the 1964 medical survey of the Rongelap people.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Charles L. Dunham

Charles L. Dunham, M. D.
Director
Division of Biology and Medicine

Enclosures:

1. Preliminary Statement dtd 3/15/64
2. AHicking to RAConard dtd 8/13/64
3. JWSampson to RAConard 9/3/64

(These enclosures are available in the Joint Committee office).