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Cable Address: ABCCOM Hiroshima, Japan

November 22, 1976

Dr. Robert A. Conard  
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Dear Bob:

The reception which I received at the Red Cross Hospital in Nagasaki to your ideas was not encouraging. In fact, the initial optimism which Dr. Kawamoto expressed in his memo concerning their probable participation in your examinations in March and April was not at all apparent from our discussions. I shall try to recapitulate our meeting.

The oldest member of the trio who was concerned with the Marshallese is Dr. Shikaya. I spent only a few minutes with him, since he was anxious to catch a train. Dr. Kawamoto, the RERF interpreter, and I then met with Dr. Tsuno, who spent several years at ABCC and is a younger member of the three. Dr. Tsuno said that the situation in the Marshall Islands had become very political, according to his conversations with the two individuals who came there for examination, and his impressions after having talked with one of the Marshall Island assemblyman who accompanied the two from the Islands. Dr. Tsuno said that the two patients complained that they had been subjected to examinations and tests in the past, but rarely were told anything about their problems. I stated that they sometimes were given medication, but they did not know what it was for. The politician told him that the Marshallese had lost confidence in the American medical program. He also said that he did not feel that the Marshallese would have much confidence in Japanese examinations, if they were done in conjunction with an American program. I then asked Dr. Tsuno how he would feel about being sponsored to go to the Marshall Islands for examinations in the form of a separate and independent mission. He then told me that he felt that if the trip was sponsored by the U.S. that the Marshallese would be very suspicious and the results would be the same. Dr. Tsuno went on to say that the situation had become very political and that doctors were reluctant to become involved in these political situations. I then told him that sometimes we had to make a stand in these matters which involved the truth, in order to see that constructive and worthwhile programs are continued. He agreed, but was unwilling to go any further.

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The next subject which arose in our conversations was that of issuing some type of statement that might be reassuring to the Marshallese. I told him that you are in the process of contacting Dr. Kumatori, who you hope would be willing to issue a statement along the lines for that which you recited to me. Dr. Tsuno was interested in finding out whether Dr. Kumatori was actually going to do this. I told him that I was uncertain about his decision, but that Dr. Tsuno should feel free to communicate with Dr. Kumatori about this matter. Dr. Tsuno then indicated that he and the other doctors would be very reluctant to write any reassuring statements of the type which I had suggested. He said that he felt that anything they said would be misinterpreted, especially by groups in Japan who were interested in the welfare of the individuals in the Marshall Islands. Again, he emphasized the strong political nature of the whole problem and his reluctance to become involved.

After our meeting at the Red Cross Hospital, I had some additional discussions with Dr. Kawamoto concerning the entire problem. He said that it appeared that the doctors had had an opportunity to talk amongst themselves after his visit with them and that they had subsequently become very wary of the circumstances. He also told me that Dr. Tsuno was one of the younger member of the team and was therefore reluctant to make any commitments, but he also felt that Dr. Tsuno had expressed the sentiments of the group. Dr. Kawamoto also told me that Dr. Tsuno discussed one other subject which was not translated to me. That concerned the strong anti-American sentiment which was developing in the Marshall Islands, mostly through the efforts of some very liberal politicians. I suspect that the man who came to Nagasaki with the two Red Cross Hospital patients was a member of that political group.

It was quite clear from our discussions that a) doctors at the Nagasaki Red Cross Hospital had changed their mind and none of them would be willing to go with you in March and April of 1977, b) none of the members of the team would be willing to go under U.S. sponsorship even for medical examinations and consultations independent of your trip in the spring, and c) they are not willing to make any public statements concerning the improbability of further late radiation effects in the Marshallese.

This turn of events does not surprise me in view of the posture that the Red Cross and A-Bomb Hospitals have maintained over the years. I don't know what is going on behind the scenes, but I was impressed by the fact that Dr. Shikaya was unable to stay for the discussions and the apologies that were given to me for not having had a meeting with the director of the Hospital who was absent. The relationships with the Red Cross Hospital in Nagasaki always have been much closer than they have been in Hiroshima, but these hospitals are very anxious to maintain their independence and to stay in the good graces of all of the A-Bomb groups which are of many political persuasions.

There is one point which I did neglect to mention earlier in my letter. I asked Dr. Tsuno what he felt would be the most effective means of restoring the confidence and trust of the involved individuals in the Marshall Islands. He said that a great deal more individual attention, particularly in regard to minor day-by-day problems, is the real solution to the problem. I then mentioned that the immediate problem is to again reestablish their cooperation in participation in the medical program. He was unable to come up with any additional suggestions.

I'm afraid that there is no good solution to your problems through the medical channels in Nagasaki. My guess is that Dr. Kumatori will have some reluctance to become involved in the problem, but even if he does agree to write the letter which you would like to have I have some reservations as to its effectiveness. It seems to me that the strong element of fear and the political forces that work finally had a very damaging effect. I'm afraid that any suggestions that I might have would either be impractical or too expensive. Furthermore, they might not be effective, but I will mention a few ideas that have come to mind. Perhaps wide dissemination of information concerning the late medical effects in Hiroshima and Nagasaki for those individuals who have had similar radiation doses might be reassuring. I would guess that the number of excess deaths that we have had in the dose range of individuals with whom you would be concerned would be negligible. I am uncertain as to just how you might distribute such information, but I am sure that there are ways. Another suggestion might be to solicit the cooperation of the University of Hawaii Medical School through its program of training paramedical individuals for the Micronesian Islands. The dean of the Medical School is Dr. Terence Rogers, who is a good friend of mine, and he has told me much about their program. On some of the islands they have very well organized medical programs and on some of the other islands there are physicians who have been there for a number of years. In the dean's office at the Medical School there also is a British doctor who is in constant communication with the islanders and has worked with them for many years. It is quite possible that a medical or paramedical team could be organized to either intermittently or continuously monitor the health of the individuals with whom you are concerned. It is quite possible that Terry Rogers and his staff might have some other worthwhile suggestions to make. Even an organized team approach from the University of Hawaii Medical School might be effective, since they have invested so much in the medical care of the islanders. Another possible approach might be to have a small radiation effect trained paramedical team available for continuous follow-up medical care for these individuals.

I know that there are many other possible approaches to your problems such as sending an independently sponsored medical team from Japan, or solicitation of the help of favorable political groups in


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the Marshall Islands. I could reopen the issue with the doctors at the Red Cross Hospital at a later date, but I don't think that the response is going to be favorable. I realize that I have made the aforementioned suggestions without a deep understanding of the problem. I also realize that I have been of very little help to you, but I seriously doubt that there is little more that can be done directly from either Hiroshima or Nagasaki in terms of medical intervention. If I can be of any additional help through my contacts at the University of Hawaii or in any other way, I hope you will be in touch with me.

Sincerely,



Stuart C. Finch, M.D.  
Chief of Research

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Copy to: Dr. L. R. Allen

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