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H-bomb fallout victims to get surgery here

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NEW YORK — On March 1, 1954, a hydrogen bomb exploding at Bikini Atoll cast a cloud of radioactive coral dust that later rained down unexpectedly on islands far downwind as well as on a Japanese fishing boat.

This week two more natives of Rongelap Island, 125 miles from the site of the blast, will be operated on for thyroid abnormalities. One was in his mother's womb at the time of the test explosion.

The operations will be done at Cleveland Metropolitan General Hospital.

The surgery will bring to 25 the number of islanders who have undergone such treatment during the past 20 years. Apart from those conceived but not yet born, there were 89 people on the island when the radioactive debris fell.

One had died of leukemia. Of the 17 who were less than 10 years old at the time, all but two have developed nodules or tumors of the thyroid gland and in two cases the thyroid failed to function entirely and the growth of the children was stunted. Now, because of treatment with artificial thyroid hormones, the children's normal growth has resumed.

In the course of the follow-up medical program, four operations revealed cancerous tumors of the thyroid, one in a resident of another island, Rongerik, where the exposure to radiation was considerably less.

According to Dr. Robert Conard, head of the medical team that has periodically visited the island, the Rongerik case may be one of the small number of thyroid tumors that occur naturally.

The results of his most recent visit and the continuing need for surgery were reported by the Friends of Micronesia, an organization based in Berkeley, Calif. Con-

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ard, reached by telephone at the Brookhaven National Laboratory near Upton, N.Y., where he is based, confirmed the report.

Although the islands where the nuclear tests took place are no longer dangerously radioactive, it is still unsafe to eat coconut crabs from the north end of Rongelap. Conard said that apparently the crabs eat their own shells, thus perpetuating a relatively high level of such substances as strontium 90.

A third case uncovered by the screening program, a woman now 45 years old, who moved to the island after the blast, will also be operated on.

The woman was part of a "control" group of islanders not exposed to the original fallout who therefore could serve as a basis for estimating the effects of exposure.

Examination of the woman a few

weeks ago disclosed thyroid nodules that normally prove harmless. While tests do not appear to be cancerous, Conard said, they are being removed as a precaution.

Dr. Conard and the three patients are expected to arrive at 1:30 p.m. today at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.

Surgery will be tomorrow and Wednesday, Dr. Conard told The Plain Dealer last night.

He said the patients are expected to remain in the hospital about a week. Surgery will be performed by Dr. Brown Dobbins of the Metropolitan General staff.

Dr. Conard said he has been working closely with Dr. Dobbins for five years and has brought three or four patients here a year for such surgery. The procedure consists of examination of the nodules and removing the diseased section, Dr. Conard said.

A dentist from the Marshall Islands will accompany the group as interpreter.

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