



BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABORATORY  
 ASSOCIATED UNIVERSITIES, INC., UPTON, L.I., N.Y.

MEDICAL DEPARTMENT

REPOSITORY DOE/PASO  
 COLLECTION DOE/NV  
 BOX No. 1228, "ERDA #3"  
BIO-MED, DR CONARD  
 FOLDER 01 THRU 12/1973

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October 9, 1973

Mr. Hemos Jilej  
 Secretary/Treasurer  
 Rongelap Fallout Survivors Association  
 C/O Robert R. Harrison  
 P.O. Box 48  
 Majuro, Marshall Islands 96960

Dear Hemos,

This is in answer to your recent letter outlining certain requests of the Rongelap Fallout Survivors Association to our medical team. We are, of course, very much interested in seeing improvement in the living conditions of the people on Rongelap. Some of the requests, I should point out should be directed to others since they are not our responsibility. As I pointed out in the village meeting at Rongelap last March our only responsibilities are concerned with health care and not with food, housing etc. I will now comment on the requests, first stating the request.

1. We would like a doctor to come to Rongelap to live, so that he may treat our illness' from day to day. This would be better than just coming once a year.

I am very much afraid we cannot fulfill the request to have a doctor living full time at Rongelap. It is very fortunate for you that we have been able to persuade Dr. Knudsen to stay in the Marshall Islands another two years to help the Trust Territory with your health care and to see that the exposed people take their thyroid medicine. Since there are many Rongelap people living at Ebeye, Majuro and elsewhere Dr. Knudsen must spend time at these other islands in addition to Rongelap. It is hoped that Dr. Knudsen will be able to visit Rongelap for a period of one to two weeks every three months (4 times a year) including the annual visit of the medical team for the usual examinations and for the short September surveys.

2. We request that when called to Majuro or Ebeye by the B.N.L. team that the patient will receive an adequate per-diem to cover all of his living expenses during his stay.

The people should not confuse B.N.L. responsibility with that of the Trust Territory with regard to per diem payments of patients. At the present time the arrangement is for BNL to pay travel expenses to those patients going to the United States for special treatment such as to the thyroid patients. In order to help the Trust Territory doctors with regular medical care of the people our doctors will sometime recommend that certain people go to Ebeye or Majuro for treatment. The Trust Territory handles the expenses in those cases-not BNL. If we recommend that any of you go to the United States for special

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*Bob Neal*

treatment you can be sure BNL will take care of your travel expenses. If another member of the patient's family must bear a financial burden due to absence of the patient we will help.

3. We would like to know for how much longer does the BNL team plan to continue their experiments on Rongelap.

We come to Rongelap not to conduct experiments but to carry out medical examinations of and provide certain health care for the Rongelap people. We hope to continue to do so as long as there is any possibility of further radiation effects. How many years this will be is difficult to say.

4. We ask that the AEC find some way to rid our coconut crabs of radioactivity, because they are a very important part of our diet, they are delicious to us, and easy to find.

I think I can speak for the AEC in saying that there is no known way to rid the coconut crabs of radioactivity. Little by little the crabs are getting rid of the radioactivity themselves and we hope before many more years pass the crabs from all of Rongelap Atoll may be safely eaten.

5. On your next visit would you care to join us in a meal of coconut crabs (caught on a safe island)?

I will be glad to join the Rongelap people in a meal of coconut crabs brought from the safe islands (islands south of Eniatok). The people may remember that several years ago for one week I ate a diet of food grown on Rongelap Atoll (pandanus, coconuts etc.) to prove that I was not afraid to eat the food.

6. Finally we request the BNL team bring more food to Rongelap, enough for the whole island to eat three meals a day during the stay of the BNL team.

When the BNL medical team comes to Rongelap we bring along food for a feast, candy and toys for the children and sometimes gifts for the people. The people also furnish food such as fish, coconuts etc. This feast and gifts are expressions of friendship. We are very happy about this friendship with the Rongelap people. The request that we bring food for the people for our whole stay at Rongelap is not in line with above purpose. If the people need more food they should discuss it with the Trust Territory.

I hope the people of Rongelap understand that we want to do all we can to carry out our responsibilities to the people with regard to health care. I hope they will realize that other matters have to be referred to the Trust Territory or the AEC. I will forward a copy of those requests to both of these agencies. We will, of course, help in any way to further the welfare of the people within the realm of our responsibility.

I will be glad to discuss these matters further with you when I see you in March. With warmest regards to all the people.

Yakwe yuk,

  
Robert Conard, M.D.

RC/ck

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