

REPORT ON VISIT TO RONGELAP AND UTIRIK ATOLLS

At the request of the Special Joint Committee Concerning Rongelap and Utirik Atolls, Congress of Micronesia, I participated as an observer of the Brookhaven National Laboratory - AEC Medical Survey Team and made observations at Ebeye Island (8 September), Rongelap Island (11-13 September) and Utirik Island (16 and 18 September). In the following, I wish to report my findings in sequence by item of the questions put to me by the Committee.

As I stated at the meeting with the congressmen held on board the Militobi on the morning of 10 September, I would like to limit my opinions mainly to thyroid diseases which is my specialty, and not attempt to answer items outside of my specialty. Further, as I do not have the results on the specimens obtained during the survey, it is requested that it be understood I shall present my opinions on the basis of past medical literature and my current observations on these islands.

1. a. Detailed physical examination as is being held on an annual basis is appropriate. However, on such remote islands with limited hygiene facilities, it is desirable to conduct in addition 3 to 4 physical examinations per year for health consultation. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the health and hygienic facilities for the local residents, independent of the H-bomb casualty survey.

b. The contents of the past surveys have been modified slightly in accordance with special requirements. The present policy is considered satisfactory, except for one grave defect. This is that almost no autopsies are performed. Autopsy is one of the most effective methods to detect the effects of the H-bomb. Though there may be technical difficulties involved in performing such in this remote district and difficulties in securing the consent of the local people, it is hoped that the medical survey team and the Government of Micronesia can cooperate in overcoming these difficulties. If it is not possible to perform autopsy on the whole body, I strongly recommend study be made of the thyroid glands at least, where disturbances are most obviously present.

c. The examinees willingly underwent physical examinations and their attitude was friendly. It was observed that members of the medical survey team were making efforts to explain the results of examination in full detail so that they might be easily understood. However, when the opinions of those examined were sought later, I received the impression that some of them did not seem to have a complete comprehension of the results. This is considered not due to inadequate efforts on the part of the medical survey team, but due to the problem of language and lack of knowledge by the examinees. It is necessary to devise a mechanism whereby the results of examinations can be fully utilized for the health preservation of the examinees.

d. From the above point of view, the following countermeasure can be considered. A mechanism whereby a medical record containing the contents

of laboratory test results with the doctor's opinion is prepared for each individual and arrangements be made for one copy to be retained by the Government of Micronesia so that it can be referred to at any time as required by doctors or a person of similar qualifications. I recommend also that more highly trained health aids be stationed on the islands and have doctors visit the island 3-4 times a year for examination and consultation, and that both the doctors and health aids cooperate in maintaining the health of the residents.

2. a. I shall limit my report to thyroid diseases.

Surgical Treatment:

The operations for thyroid cancer that have been conducted are appropriate. It is usually the case with adenomatous goiter that operation is performed only after the tumor becomes enlarged causing disturbances. Therefore, for small adenomatous goiters as seen in many of the exposed, total thyroidectomy or similar operations are not required. It is enough to closely follow the course and perform an operation only when cancer is strongly suspected. However, for the following reasons, the treatment given in the past is considered to have been inevitable.

(1) Under the present system where one examination is made per year, it is not possible to make detailed follow-up observations. Therefore, it is safer to perform such operations on cases with even the slightest suspicion.

(2) From the biopsy specimens prepared from surgical material, I received the impression that some parts showed severe cell abnormality. Considerations must be given to the possibility of such areas developing into cancer in the future. From the standpoint of preventing radiation induced cancer from occurring, it is safer to perform such operations.

Medical Treatment:

(1) Treatment with Synthroid after operation of the thyroid is considered as having been properly administered in view of the fact that the patients failed to show symptoms considered as due to hypothyroidism.

(2) Administration of Synthroid for prevention of thyroid diseases is also considered as being properly handled, though some patients were found not to be taking the medicine as instructed by the doctor. This is considered due to the reason stated in 1-c, and the necessity for a means to more effectively utilize the results of examinations as stated in 1-d was keenly felt.

b. The above stated opinions are presented on the basis of my knowledge, experience and reference from medical literature.

3. Additional Comments

Item 1. This is beyond the realm of my specialty.

Item 2. All of my opinions have been stated above.

Item 3. This is beyond the realm of my specialty.

NOTE: The Medical Survey Team of Brookhaven National Laboratory - AEC is conducting the survey with a sincere attitude in a way considered appropriate from the medical point of view and is not only contributing much to the treatment and prevention of diseases among the exposed people, but also is providing service to the health preservation of the local people in general. I am deeply impressed by the great effort being devoted to this difficult work which is being carried out in the inconveniently located areas. It shall make me very happy if what I have stated will serve as some reference in achieving even better accomplishments.



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