

February 4, 1974

Dr. and Mrs. Keith Fairley  
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Melbourne, Victoria  
Australia 3004

Dear Keith and Eileen:

It was indeed a great pleasure to hear from you just before Christmas. It gives me to feel that I am back in the world of busy colleagues when you raise questions or make statements in relation to actual medical problems. Let me say to you that in my opinion our E.P.A. governmental organization in Washington has developed an attitude and followed a policy which has little relation to the facts of life concerning lead as well as some of the other materials which enter into the common environment. I have had little to say or do about the problem of lead in the environment of man recently, but have been concerning myself with an attempt to prepare for publication some of the investigations of recent years. While I directed the affairs of the Kettering Laboratory, I had very little opportunity to write papers covering the details of my own experimental work. Consequently, there is much to be done. One of the younger men here has interested himself in the lead problem, and I'm sure he can and will see to it that more of this work can be studied and published than I shall be able to do. Incidentally, I may say to you that I have recovered many of my one-time abilities to do things. However, I am slow - very slow at present, because, in large part, of my diminished vision (developing bilateral cataracts). When these eyes of mine can be restored to greater usefulness, I shall not be so handicapped. However, I have sustained somewhat more cerebral damage than I believed originally, and I shall continue to be a bit slow and, perhaps, also a bit disabled otherwise, although not actually remarkably disabled. In other words, I continue to improve, physically and mentally, I believe, despite irreversible flaws in my memory.

With reference to analytical methods for lead, and specifically as to the dithizone method, let me say that it is now clearly known that there are methods of analysis of greater sensitivity than the dithizone, but within the limits of the quantities we are called upon to deal with, in practical and clinical methods of diagnosis and physiological interpretation, the dithizone method is eminently satisfactory. One cannot complain at all about its accuracy within the limits of the usual quantities which are to be dealt with - that is, down to 1 microgram. It is doubtful that any situation which runs into fractions of 1 microgram, can be dealt with properly by means of the dithizone method. However, as I indicated above, the question with respect to this method is that of sensitivity, and not at all accuracy of analysis. Furthermore, let me make one further statement. The problem of the hazards of lead absorption for small children is grossly misunderstood by E.P.A. and a number of recent investigators, because none of these people have had experience with clinical lead poisoning in children. When they find traces of lead in children - a matter which is virtually universal - they speak of hazardous conditions, and fail to realize that lead poisoning in children is hardly ever caused by very small quantities of lead but is almost always induced by swallowing fairly large quantities - i.e., milligrams of lead, not micrograms.

I was glad to be brought up to date by you on the status of Ken Lloyd and others in your area. I keep in touch with Pat Barry (and others) in England. Incidentally, Pat was here last week for a couple of days, and the last time I was in London, I met with several of the men there, including Dr. Lawther, who is one of the most experienced investigators. I should tell you that my old friend, Dr. Sir Charles Dodds, the biochemist, died unexpectedly, recently. He was planning to come over to the United States soon, and I was shocked by his death.

You are quite right. The situation - economic and otherwise - in England, at this time, is shocking. I am not at all certain what is back of the troubles of England but Heath seems to be in real trouble. I sincerely hope that matters in Australia are much better and I strongly suspect that the labor union situation bears little relation to that in England - I hope so at any rate.

We, in the United States, are in trouble, and I think it will be some time before we emerge from our troubles. They are not, however, so great as to be insurmountable and it is possible to believe that they are only temporary. We need and need greatly a new political outlook. One might suspect that the Washington government is not really representative of the attitudes of the country generally, and I strongly suspect that some thoroughgoing house-cleaning will have to be done before we can return to some reasonably sound position in the world and in our own attitude.

We had a good Christmas this year, despite the many things that are disturbing in the American scene, especially in the weather in Cincinnati. Lucile and I did not go to San Francisco this year, in large measure because we wanted (after an episode of respiratory upset) to get to where we could be sure of warmth and sunshine. We have just returned from ten days in Miami Beach, where we had the heat and the sun, but could not take the hotel - people situation for longer than 10 days. And so you see it was not altogether a matter of warmth and sunshine.

I plan - if it is at all possible - to go to Montana for fishing in August, and have invited our Kathleen to come home from England and go with me. Lucile would not even consider letting me go alone - despite the fact that she hates the very idea of ranch life (and fishing) in Montana, and so I invited Katy to come home and go with me. She is an excellent rider of horses and a good fly-fisherman (or fisherwoman, if you will), and she has jumped at the idea. I cannot be sure that she will be as enthusiastic as she seems about the trip, for she is good enough to go with me if I want her to do so. However, unless she has greatly changed over the years of England of developing maturity (she is now 52 years of age), she will love the Western mountains, the trout streams and the free life of the ranch. If this jaunt turns out right, it will be partly due to my virtually complete recovery from my remaining disabilities, and so I look forward to it for myself as well as for Katy. She is a dear and full of enthusiasm, and this should really be a great occasion for me.

With the very best regards of Lucile as well as of myself to both of you, I am,

Sincerely,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

Professor Emeritus of Occupational Medicine

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