

File with
unfamiliar complaints
J. H. D.

Find Locy

January 24, 1939

Dr. Paul B. Newcomb
Defiance
Ohio

My dear Paul:-

Thanks very much for your
letter of January 1st and the report from Dr.
Waggoner.

Unfortunately this report
and your own comments do not give me much help in
the matter of arriving at a diagnosis of lead
poisoning. Polyneuritis due to lead, at the time
it first appears, is an acute intoxication, and in
my experience it is always accompanied by definite
signs of abnormal lead absorption. At the time of
onset, in my experience, there are always other
symptoms of intoxication and there are always blood
changes. The absence of these and the absence of
any mention of them either on your part or by Dr.
Waggoner is, in my opinion, in and of itself, almost
conclusive evidence that the condition was not due
to lead. In any case, one would not be justified in
making a diagnosis of lead intoxication without find-
ing certain very definite evidences of abnormal lead
absorption, and I take it that neither you nor Dr.
Waggoner found such evidence. The diagnosis of lead
poisoning would rest, therefore, on a vague and
indefinite history of lead exposure. Dr. Waggoner's
statement that exposure to leaded gasoline sometimes
produces lead poisoning is untrue, so far as I know.
On the contrary, the type of lead exposure indicated in
this man's history has never in my experience of fifteen
years, been demonstrated to have produced a single case
of lead intoxication. Moreover we have studied this type
of exposure in terms of the lead excretion of a large number
of the most seriously exposed filling station workmen
and garage mechanics, and we have never been able to
obtain the slightest evidence that there is any significant lead
absorption associated with these activities. As a consequence
of these facts it would not be possible for me to arrive
at the conclusion that this man had ever had any
significant exposure to lead compounds, unless I was

presented with indubitable evidence that he had absorbed lead in some fashion from some source. In the absence of such information, I can not bring myself to conclude that lead was a factor in his illness.

Thanks very much for your information. I hope you will live up to your promise to come in and see me when you come to Cincinnati the next time. I would like very much to show you around and to show you some of the things we are doing.

With kindest personal regards,

I am

Sincerely yours,

RAK:ls

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.