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April 21, 1952

Mr. H. M. Jackson
Safety Engineer
Johns-Manville Corporation
22 East 40th Street
New York City 16

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Dear Mr. Jackson:

The problem of presenting hygienic information to one's employees, particularly those who are engaged in potentially hazardous occupations, is one that has given a good many people a considerable amount of anxiety. In my opinion, the manner in which this is done, depends very largely upon the circumstances. If one is merely dealing with information of general consequence, there is not much of a problem except that of presenting the material in such a way that it receives the attention it deserves. However, in those situations in which misunderstandings are likely to be created, and in which anxiety may be stimulated rather than abated, one has to size up the situation and act accordingly. I do not presume to know how serious your problem is, and therefore what I shall say will be based on a matter of principle rather than on the most desirable answer to your own specific problem.

In my feeling the question of silicosis, and of disability in connection with silicosis, which is quite another matter, is a medical problem, which should be dealt with by medical people. If I were dealing with a group of employees who were exposed in a potentially hazardous situation of this sort, I would want to deal with them individually rather than collectively and in the course of a more or less normal medical interview and examination rather than in any other way. This is an individual problem, and the reaction to it is decidedly individual in character. Here, in my opinion, the sympathetic relationship which exists between the doctor and the potential patient provides the basis in which this discussion can be dealt with satisfactorily from every angle. This may or may not be feasible in your situation, but it is, I think, the best way to deal with the problem. My experience in dealing with groups in this kind of a problem is not reassuring. What frequently happens is that one or two individuals, who may have an axe to grind or who may have some special problem, often irrelevant, on their mind, can destroy the whole atmosphere of such a meeting and throw it into a controversial state, through asking questions which are either not answered to their satisfaction or are more or less sidestepped. If one sets up a situation whereby information

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is presented and no opportunity is given for asking questions, then there is a tendency to feel that questions have been suppressed. As I say, all of this depends upon the circumstances, but if it is your purpose to develop the facts which will lead to proper precautions on the part of your people, you have one problem. If you are undertaking to allay apprehension, you have still another problem. The purely educational program, which has no immediate problem of anxiety to deal with, can be dealt with in lectures, demonstrations, lantern slides, movies and the like. Those which involve anxiety, and other problems of industrial relations of a serious type had best be dealt with, in my experience, by the issuance of carefully written information and instructions, accompanied by the provision of opportunity for an interview with the physician. Otherwise, I think it best to have the entire matter dealt with by the physician with individual employees, as opportunity is afforded in normal medical work to carry out such interviews.

I am not sure that my comments will be of much help to you, but if they do suggest certain additional questions to you, I should be glad to have you write to me further. Moreover, if you would like to tell me more about the nature of your problem, I might be able to give you somewhat better advice - better, at least, from my own viewpoint - than that which is included here.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoc, M. D.

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