

Sub

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PLANT
BUICK-OLDSMOBILE-PONTIAC ASSEMBLY DIVISION
GENERAL MOTORS CORPORATION
2700 TWEEEDY BOULEVARD
SOUTH GATE, CALIFORNIA

TELEPHONE
LUCAS 9111

December 16, 1949

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.
College of Medicine
Eden Avenue
Cincinnati 19, Ohio

Dear Dr. Kehoe:

Many thanks for your nice letter of November 22, 1949. Would have answered it much sooner, but was unable to do so because of pressing work and a long illness. I am especially pleased by the considerate and friendly attitude not only displayed in this letter but also in our personal relationships in Cincinnati. The spirit of the advise was greatly valued although certain parts of it were not effective since they were predicated on false premises which you were influenced to assume. Had you been given a suitable opportunity to carefully weigh all the circumstances, some of your conclusions would have been entirely different. This is not only my opinion but that of others who are closely associated with our corporation.

Please do not interpret in the above that I am in any way trying to absolve myself of my mistakes in managing the lead problem. In main, they are along different lines than that indicated in your letter. They were based largely on misinformation, lack of information, over work, etc. However, I, as well as my associates, are emphatic in the belief that my errors are insignificant in comparison to the failure of management to cooperate with the Medical Department.

Judging from the reports, your conferences here did considerable amount of good. Seems too bad I was kept in ignorance of your visit for I would like to have been better informed about your opinions of our setup, and also about certain developments that have occurred since then. Had I been informed of your visit it would have been a simple matter to have been present.

So far, I have been unable to report to Mr. Clark of my trip to Kansas City and Cincinnati. Wonder why?

Sincerely,

W. E. Bones
W. E. BONES, M.D.
Medical Director

KE 0005538

*intend as this form
analytical data will be
available
file under Plant Surveys*

November 22, 1949

Dr. William E. Bones, Medical Director,
Southern California Plant,
General Motors Corporation,
2700 Tweedy Boulevard,
South Gate, California.

Dear Doctor Bones:

In accordance with your request I am returning to you herewith the letter you handed me. You will be interested in knowing that I talked with Doctor Johnstone about this situation, and that I did everything else I could to familiarize myself with the problem with which you and the people at the plant are concerned. You probably know by this time that I met and talked with Mr. Clark, that I saw the plant, and went over the problem as well as I could in a short time. Despite the fact that the plant was not in operation, I saw some things which were quite helpful. I discussed the matter at some length with Mr. Clark and his associates, and I have written to him confirming some of my observations and conclusions. Some of the things I said concerned you, and more particularly, the nature of the work of an industrial physician in such a situation. The purpose of the present letter, however, is essentially personal.

I am convinced of your sincerity of purpose and of your interest in the welfare of the men. Despite our apparent disagreement on certain points, in our discussion of your cases, I have a feeling that your reactions are generally sound and that your interest in doing a good job is very real. These qualities are so important among industrial physicians, that I rate them very highly, and I hope that it will be possible for you to carry on this work which you have undertaken. Despite our short acquaintance this hope may perhaps justify a word or two of advice to you in this relationship. My conversations with Mr. Clark led me to believe that he is an honest and able man, and that one can deal with him in a straightforward manner. I have a feeling that you have been somewhat defensive in your reactions because of your difficulties, and that you have been leaning over somewhat backwards in your concern about some of your men. I cannot escape the feeling that part of this concern has been to justify yourself. I think you have had ample reason to feel this way, but I also think that that is not the way to deal with this problem. I have dealt with workmen in hazardous trades for a good many years. I have never learned to be unsympathetic, but I have learned to listen quietly, to manifest no concern and to try to find proof by means of which to determine the facts in the case without an undue emotional response. There has been enough of a number of types of difficulty in your plant and among your men to inspire antagonism, apprehension, and other attitudes, including some "gold-bricking." Therefore, you

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will have to be coldly critical of subjective complaints, until such a time as you have been able to get things on a even keel. This is hard doctrine, and it can only be justified on the basis that the effects of moderate exposure to lead compounds are rarely disabling over prolonged periods of time. I know full well that an industrial physician can never afford to be "hard-boiled." On the other hand, I also know from experience that he cannot afford to be hoodwinked. Any man who is able to deceive him and get away with it is a continuing source of disaffection among all the other employees. Therefore, it is necessary for the physician to be a man among his men, and to be able to deal with the situations that arise in such a way as to deserve the respect of his men. It is necessary, therefore, to be honest and to be sympathetic up to a point, but to be critical and even stern when need be.

I shall not pursue the subject further, for I think I have said enough to indicate what I have in mind. I hope that this matter will get itself straightened out, and I also hope that we shall meet again when neither of us is under any pressure of any kind.

With kindest regards,

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

RAK cc

Enc.

Dictated but not read.

KE 0005540