

April 22, 1944

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Dr. H. A. Minthorne,
121 South Sixth Street,
Columbus, Ohio.

Dear Dr. Minthorne:

I have no information at all that would lead me to believe that there is any relationship between lead absorption and the development of a cyst of the pancreas. We have never seen a case of this type, nor have we had any reports of this condition among the rather numerous groups of workers of the lead trades with whom we have direct and indirect contact. Off hand, I do not see any good reason why there should be any such secondary or complicating lesion in lead poisoning. I do not mean by this to indicate that we know all that should be known about lead poisoning, but so far as I know, there is no reason to suspect that damage to the pancreas occurs specifically, selectively, or even occasionally in lead poisoning.

I am just a little bit curious as to what you mean in saying that ".....lead poisoning.....had been proven by blood examination." So far as I am aware, there is no way of proving the existence of lead poisoning by a blood examination. The presence of the stippling within certain quantitative limits is strongly suggestive evidence, of course, if the numerous other causes of stippling can be reasonably eliminated. Otherwise, I know of no laboratory measure that will provide a basis for the diagnosis of lead poisoning, although the presence of sufficient quantities of lead in the tissues, blood or excreta will indicate the occurrence and the approximate magnitude of the lead absorption. The diagnosis can be made, however, on the basis of clinical evidence of illness that is characteristic of lead intoxication and that is not more readily explained by other causes.

I make mention of the diagnostic aspects of the problem for the reason that the diagnosis of lead poisoning is made much too readily. All that is required in many instances is a history of some type of lead exposure, without regard to its severity. For this reason I should be very suspicious of the report of the French surgeon referred to in your letter, unless

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The criteria for the diagnosis of lead poisoning were given
and found to be acceptable.

Cordially yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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