

January 30, 1964

Clair C. Patterson, Ph.D.
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Pasadena, California

Dear Doctor Patterson:

I am grateful to you for your letter of January 9th, and especially for the reprints of articles published by yourself and your associates.

As you may know, our group has been engaged for many years, among other activities, in investigating the distribution of lead compounds in soil, water, air, vegetation and animals including man, with the primary purpose of establishing the pattern of the intake and absorption of lead compounds by man, as well as those involved in the distribution, excretion and retention, under a variety of conditions which exist in modern life, as well as experimental conditions. Our observations with respect to the oceans have been limited essentially to the determination of the lead content of certain samples of sea water obtained by ourselves or under our supervision, and that of few random specimens of living organisms together with some coral skeletons obtained for us, following our instructions, in Caribbean waters, by a colleague. (I mention the latter, not because of any great importance which may attach to a few interesting results, but because it is indicative of a much wider interest than we have had the means and time to follow up.)

I am delighted, therefore, to know some of the results of your investigations and I am interested in knowing more about them. The approach to a wider knowledge of the facts concerning the distribution of lead compounds within the earth's crust, including its seas, and the redistribution which continues to occur through the operation of natural forces and the intervention of men in various ways, is a fascinating subject, in itself. I cannot hope, ever, to see these facts as a whole, but I am interested in knowing as much as I can. My scientific interest in lead extends into the broader area of the rôle of trace metals in human physiology, but my primary field of professional responsibility is that of industrial health in a certain very direct relationship with industrial employees, as well as industrial management. It includes public health in so far as the public is subjected, at second hand, for the most part, to hazards of industrial origin. This Laboratory, as a whole, is composed of individuals in many scientific disciplines who have their specific enthusiasms, but as a group engaged in medical research and also service including consultation, we act (or so we undertake to do and hope to succeed most of the time) in the manner and attitude of a physician who serves those threatened with ill health.

So much for my introduction of myself and my associates. Because of our interests and concerns we look out for opportunities for exchanges of information and ideas with colleagues in many scientific fields. In the field which you represent, I have a very meager background, even less than I have in

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the geology of the land masses. But I would like very much to meet and talk with you, and to learn more of the present and future significance of your observations and their further extension. Among other things, I'd like to know more about the distribution of trace elements in the living organisms in the seas, and the possible effects of variations in the composition of water in various seas and in different parts of the same seas.

It may be of interest to you to have a partial summary of our work on lead, particularly perhaps, as it has concerned itself with specific problems of human health. I had to assemble some of the more important results of some thirty years of work, some time ago in preparing for a series of three lectures in London. There was little opportunity, under the mandate of this lecture-ship, to include much of the work of others, and therefore this represents a partial summary of our own work. For that reason, it will not convey to you anything like the full scope of the work that has been done toward the elucidation of the problems of human health in relation to lead. It will be of interest to you, however, I believe, as an expression of our viewpoint as to both objectives and methods. On this account, I am sending a bound copy of the reprinted lectures with my compliments.

Let me repeat that I would be delighted if we could find an early opportunity for meeting and talking together.

Cordially yours,

RAK:vr

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

Encl. - Harben Lectures

2-27-64 - copy to Mr. Scales with personal note -

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