

January 29, 1945

Mr. J. H. Schaefer,
Ethyl Corporation,
Chrysler Building,
New York City 17.

Dear John:

I am returning to you herewith your file of correspondence with Felix Wormser of Lead Industries Association, together with various other materials which he supplied to you. I am not sure that you wanted all of this back, but since I had it all pinned together, I am returning it. If you do not want to keep the letter to members and the preliminary report on the "Time" article, I should be glad to have them in my file, but this is not of very much consequence, since I have discussed this whole subject with Mr. Wormser.

As you know from our little talk about this previously I am in complete sympathy with your letter of June 27. In addition I cannot fail to be somewhat critical of the comments of Mr. Wormser on various phases of the subject of lead poisoning in children. Whatever he may wish to think about this matter, lead poisoning in children is all too frequent. When it occurs, it is usually a very serious disease, and for this reason the warnings given to the public through various avenues are likely to be useful, and therefore should not be unduly criticized, even if they do contain some misinformation. Mr. Wormser takes the position that since reliable manufacturers do not supply play pens and the like that have been painted with lead paint, that all this is a tempest in a tea pot. In this, he is mistaken, for I can show him the records of a number of cases that are fully authenticated even to his satisfaction. Some, but not all of these have been the result of eating paint.

He is also much too much convinced that he has proved the case against the X-Ray diagnosis in children. He has found some bad examples of medical thinking and of medical publications on this subject. There seems little doubt that lead in and of itself in the bones will not produce a shadow. On the other hand, a shadow is produced in several abnormal states in the growth of the bones in children, and the evidence is nevertheless strongly suggestive that the absorption of lead brings about certain metabolic changes in the bones of children that produce a line or shadow that is demonstrable by X-Ray. Whether this is actually the result of lead in the tissues or whether it is change indirectly due to the presence of lead in the tissues, is a matter of no consequence. Additional experimental work will

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have to be done to prove or disprove the position now taken by a number of physicians and radiologists. However, there is no reason in getting excited about this and attacking the doctors for the benefit of the lead industry. I am quite sure that a number of mistaken diagnoses have been made. I am also quite sure that the effects of the absorption of lead are given undue weight in the consideration of a rather large number of minor and major illnesses. However, it will not be possible for any special pleader to offset the presumable disadvantages of these viewpoints. This can only be done by laborious and well planned experimental work. Actually we are planning some work along this line in collaboration with some of our colleagues in the Children's Hospital here. It would be quite impossible for us to do anything significant until the war and its special pressure have come to an end.

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As to the discussion of this subject within/Board of the Lead Industries Association, I again reaffirm my willingness to be of any assistance that I can if the opportunity affords itself. I think, however, I should warn you and the Board that it would be a mistake for Mr. Wormser to publish material and information of the type that is outlined in his preliminary report. It is possible to pick numerous flaws both in his facts and in his reasoning. He is not aware of it, but he does not know enough about the basic information on this subject to discuss it critically and adequately. I say this without being unduly critical, for I like him, and he is a pretty competent fellow. However, there is much more in this matter than he has any knowledge of. For example, he tends to refer critically to the observations made by the men in the Health Department of the City of Baltimore. I happen to know these men and their methods of working. The methods are good and the results obtained have been sound. They have demonstrated clearly that a rather surprising number of youngsters in the city of Baltimore have had significant and dangerous exposure to lead in their environment. Unfortunately for Wormser's thesis, comparable results have been obtained in almost every other area of the United States where there have been facilities that enable accurate investigation of this type to be made.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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