

KALGOORLIE.

14th July, 1961.

JMcN.AW.



Dr. B. Hunt,
37 Ord Street,
WEST PERTH.

Dear Dr. Hunt,

Thank you for your kind letter and report on Mr.
of Wittenoom.

I agree that a diagnosis of asbestosis cannot be established on the strength of the X-rays alone and am naturally pleased to have that opinion confirmed. He has never been formally diagnosed as suffering from pulmonary disease. Because of his length of time in the industry and the minimal changes at both bases in 1960 as compared with his original X-rays it was considered advisable to warn him of the possibility of developing industrial chest disease so that he would avoid unnecessary exposure to asbestos and silica dust.

As you know, the diagnosis of asbestosis in the early stages is extremely difficult and must often be presumptive. A normal Chest X-ray does not exclude it and the presence of asbestos bodies does not confirm it. The inaccessibility of Wittenoom and its distance from the commonly accepted ancillary aids to diagnosis make it even more difficult.

Under ordinary circumstances there would be no urgency and it would be better to wait a year or two before suggesting a diagnosis affecting a workers health and livelihood. Dust control at the mine and mill at Australian Blue Asbestos was and is bad. Workers have developed asbestosis and silicosis with gross clinical and radiological signs and grave disability after relatively short exposures. Failure to advise a worker that there was some doubt about his X-ray and delaying a decision for a year might expose him unwittingly, to half as much dust again. The diagnosis might then be certain but the effect on his health disastrous.

Histological proof of many of the diagnoses made, has been obtained from post-mortem material and from sections obtained at lung biopsy and during pulmonary resections. A few weeks ago post-mortem on a man aged 47 years, who had worked for 2 years only in the mill at Australian Blue Asbestos (1949-51) confirmed that he had a malignant pleural mesothelioma and pulmonary asbestosis and silicosis. A pretty shocking finding in a modern industry.

An unforeseen, but highly beneficial by product of the warning to Mr. [redacted] has been the alerting of the C.S.R. to the grave health hazard existing in there subsidiary company and a real effort is now being made to improve conditions.

I Have to go to Darwin on Monday, 24th July '61, returning via Wittenoom to examine workers. I would very much like to see you and could, perhaps, call at your rooms, by appointment, on Monday afternoon, 24th July. I would like to see Dr. Merritt's X-rays. One of our difficulties is that the Mobile X-ray Unit filming at Wittenoom cannot produce technically, perfect and consistent Chest X-rays.

Attached are a few recent reports which I prepared on the health of asbestos workers. I don't wish to bore you, but I am grateful for your interest.

Kind regards,

Yours faithfully,

J. McNulty
MINES MEDICAL OFFICER