

June 13, 1969

Mr. Edward Gross
Science Service, Inc.
1719 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Gross:

I appreciate very much the manner in which you received the comments and implied advice in my recent letter.

Let me say in reply to your argument for the public discussion of controversial subjects that I do not disagree. I believe fully in the dissemination of information on any and all matters that are of concern to the public, and I consider the sound judgment of well informed laymen to have more weight than that of the involved scientist. What I must inveigh against is misinformation and misplaced emphasis on the several aspects of a controversy.

Let me illustrate the point. In preparation for the presentation of a paper on a "Toxicological Appraisal of Lead" (in the air) I, who have worked in this field for many years, and am fairly well informed as to the details, as well as the major issues, spent almost three months in reviewing the published literature on the subject during the past ten years (or thereabouts), making copious notes for my own purposes, before writing a line, I could not afford to omit anything of real significance that might well have escaped me while engaged in my own work. This is what is required to review a subject for the benefit of one's colleagues, many of whom are unfamiliar with the physiological facts and factors which enter into the consideration of such a matter.

The professional writer, in his relation to the public and its interest, is responsible for carrying out a sufficiently searching examination of the facts and of the personalities concerned in a significant public issue to (1) appreciate fully his own limitations in the appraisal of the information; (2) to be able to avoid misstatements of fact; and to clarify the issues whether conclusions concerning them can be arrived at, or must be postponed. This, I believe, is good reporting. I do not agree that anything less than this is worthy of the attention of the lay reader. I am also reasonably confident that the truth in these matters will come out, if we (our society, its legislators, etc.) do not rush in to do something, before we learn the truth.

I'll be interested in seeing your article, and I will comment on it, so far as I can, for your benefit.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.
Professor Emeritus of
Occupational Medicine

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LEA 004 22