

March 14, 1958

Mr. Wayne A. Becker
US VA Hospital Building 77
Roanoke, Virginia

Dear Mr. Becker:

The questions raised in your letter of March 6th are such that one could not hope to answer them by means of any "tests" which are available. Such tests as are valid are based upon the determination of the concentration of lead in the tissues of the body, as estimated by the rate of the excretion of lead from the body, and by the concentration of lead in the blood. After the period of years of freedom from exposure indicated in your letter, the lead content of your tissues can be expected, with complete confidence, to be within normal limits, and to give no evidence, whatever, of the levels of concentration that existed during or immediately after the war. These tests, therefore, would now be of no avail.

One could obtain some knowledge of the potential severity of your illness, and its possible relationship to the absorption of lead, only by a very careful review of your activities during the period in question, by consideration of the nature of your illness, and by looking into alternate possibilities. This, I and my associates would be quite prepared to do, if you choose to come to Cincinnati for that purpose.

I shall not conceal from you my very great doubt that you had lead poisoning at any time. I am fairly familiar with the conditions that existed during the war, with respect to the nature of the potential exposure to lead that existed within the British military services. The likelihood of lead poisoning was certainly not great, and moreover, the signs and symptoms of the type of poisoning most likely to occur were not well known among physicians generally. The illness which you describe in outline is certainly not typical, and I strongly suspect that this diagnosis was made without adequate evidence that you had absorbed a significant quantity of lead. Indeed, I know of no facilities, except for one laboratory in London, in which the necessary tests could have been made.

I do not mean by these statements to suggest that you did not have competent medical advice. What I do mean is that the experience of physicians, generally, with lead poisoning, outside of certain industrial circles, has been so meager, that

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Mr. Wayne A. Becker -(2)- March 14, 1958

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the diagnosis of the disease is more in the nature of a logical guess than it is a matter of the interpretation of evidence.

Of more importance to you is the fact that any lead poisoning which you may have acquired in the African Campaign can confidently be expected to have cleared up, without residual effects, long ago. The fact that you appear to be anxious about your health - and therefore are not entirely well - is sufficient evidence that your trouble is not lead poisoning at this time. If you are actually ill you should be able to find adequate advice and help where you are. If, on the other hand, you are merely worried about the residual effects of lead poisoning upon your present health, I advise you to dismiss this concern from your mind. I know of no disease that is less likely to cause persistent illness, disability and incapacity, after the discontinuance of further abnormal absorption of lead, than lead poisoning. If you consult some local physician who would like to communicate with me after being shown this letter, I shall be glad to explain my views to him in detail.

Very truly yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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