

June 28, 1952

Dr. C. Richard Walmer, Managing Director
Industrial Hygiene Foundation of America, Inc.
Mellon Institute
4400 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh (13) Pennsylvania

Dear Doctor Walmer:

I am pleased by your invitation to accept membership on the Medical Committee of the Industrial^{Hygiene} Foundation and I am prepared to accept. I should be less than frank if I were to fail to warn you and the Foundation, that my first obligation which seems rather heavy at times, is to my job and my associates in this University and Department, and that there are times when I cannot contribute much to other professional activities. With this reservation, which relates both to time and energy, I shall be glad to do what I can as a member of this Committee.

In searching my mind for the subject matter of a program for either of the Conferences, I find no lack of problems, but a dearth of those which will lend themselves to fresh and productive discussion. In our round of meetings on various aspects of industrial health, we tend to repeat too often, and since the discussion is carried on within a fairly limited professional circle, the result is not too satisfactory. What is needed is a critical consideration in the near future, of the weaknesses of our present position, and of the possible courses from which we must choose, if we are to consolidate our gains and pioneer into the future.

I am thinking aloud, without having the time now to do more, and if that should be helpful, you are indeed welcome to it. As I see our present situation, the greatest difficulty from the practical viewpoint, is that we do not have the means of applying the knowledge that is available. The technique of industrial hygiene needs developing further, admittedly, in a changing industrial scene, and what is known to a few needs dissemination to the many, but the important fact is that, quite apart from research and professional education, which are the essence of the two needs above, there is a much greater problem which will hardly be met even if these needs are satisfied, - namely, the present inaccessibility of the great body of industry and industrial personnel. Knowledge has so far outstripped its application to industrial practice as to make a puny accomplishment of our efforts, as compared to what it should be. To change this requires knowledge of another sort, which we shall have difficulty in acquiring, but for which we should feel the need urgently. How shall we develop in ourselves and in our profession a sufficient understanding of the industrial society of our time so that we can find suitable and democratic means of applying the available knowledge to the benefit of the working population?

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I should like to hear this general problem explored as carefully as it may be, on the organizational, educational and legislative fronts, limiting it specifically to industrial health. Obviously this is the problem - that of influencing peoples' minds - that confronts all civilized people, national and international. We are smart technically and dull socially and culturally, but it is time that we in industrial medicine face our problem and find out what we can about it. It will be difficult to do, and will result in criticism from a variety of sources, as does all pioneering. However, in my opinion, if you want to reach into the important questions of industrial health, this is it.

How is the answer to be obtained, or the subject even discussed? I don't know, beyond being certain that one should go at it cautiously, not as crusaders, but in the careful, critical, step-wise manner by which we have built up technical knowledge. Perhaps you can think of some facet of this matter that might be approached at an early meeting of the Foundation, and might pave the way for later additional discussion in the same direction.

I shall think this over a bit, and I shall give some thought to specific technical problems which might be discussed, and if and when I have something worthwhile, I shall drop you a note - not a dissertation, as this has turned out to be, at a time when I should be attending to other matters on my desk.

Cordially yours,

RAK:vr

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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