

MEMORANDUM ON PROPOSED EXPERIMENTAL WORK

in

The Kettering Laboratory of Applied Physiology

The presence of variable amounts of lead and certain other metals in foodstuffs in general has become an increasingly important problem in recent years. With the expanding efforts of the Food and Drugs Administration of the federal Department of Agriculture to bring a wider range of food products within the limits of safety, as defined by law, this problem has become an acute issue in a number of the food industries. Materials which hitherto have been assumed to be free of lead have been found to contain quantities in excess of the legal tolerance, and both raw materials and finished products have been condemned and destroyed or otherwise removed from the market.

For some time it has been apparent that a comprehensive investigation of foods in general with respect to the sources and quantities of their heavy metal constituents, is needed. It is equally apparent to those familiar with this problem, that there is no sound physiological basis for setting standards as to the permissible or safe lead content of foods either individually or in terms of the aggregate quantity ingested daily by human beings. The Kettering Laboratory has accumulated and published more reliable information in this general field than has any other experimental group in this country, and its staff is interested in many aspects of the problem. It is not surprising, therefore, that certain

industries involved in actual or potential difficulties should have sought the advice and assistance of the laboratory.

At present, the chewing gum industry has requested an investigation of the sources and the quantities of lead which occur in its raw and finished products. It wishes to know its present and predictable situation in relation to this entire problem. This industry as represented by the American Chicle Company, Beech-Nut Packing Company, and the Wrigley Company, and operating, in this instance, through the Chicle Development Company of 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, has placed itself in our hands, substantially, in the matter of the scope, means, and cost of a proper investigation, and moreover, has expressed a willingness to subsidize on a reasonable scale (to be determined later) a fundamental physiological study of the problem of the lead tolerance of human beings. A verbal understanding has been reached with their responsible officials as to the conditions under which this laboratory can approach and conduct such an investigation. The working out of further details awaits the decision of the administrative authorities of the University as to the expediency or the propriety, in principle, of the project, and as to any matters of procedure whereby the general policy of the University may be maintained or, if necessary, clarified.

It is not suggested, herein, that there is any factor in the contemplated investigation, or in relation to industrial management that alters in principle the position taken previously by this laboratory on the authorization of the Board of Directors of the University. It should be pointed out, however, that the ramifications of this problem are many and varied, and that both commercial consideration and the public interest are involved, and to some degree apparently opposed. The Director of Kettering Laboratory has no wish to sidestep

the responsibility for carrying on work in fields which require balanced ethical judgments. On the other hand he has no wish to represent the University in any public position which is not fully understood and approved by its Administration.

Respectfully submitted
