

BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABORATORY

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: May 27th, 1977

TO: See Distribution Below

FROM: R.A. Conard *RA*

SUBJECT: Recent Items
Medical Program, Marshall Islands

Increasing evidence for developing thyroid hypofunction in exposed Rongelap people needs further investigation. Conference with Drs. Larsen (Peter Bent Brigham) and Robbins and Wolff (NIH) resulted in plans to stop synthroid therapy on all exposed Rongelap people who have not had thyroid surgery for a period of three months, and then test for hypothyroid state in each individual measuring TSH levels and in some cases using the TRH stimulation test. In view of possible compensation for hypothyroidism in the exposed Rongelap peoples and also for medical reasons, it is felt that a more accurate assessment of thyroid function is necessary.

The high incidence of multiple intestinal parasite infestation in the Marshallese has always been a problem. Dr. A. Krotoski (PHS), an expert in this field participating in the past survey, believes it may be possible to virtually eradicate most parasites in individuals on an island using the FDA-approved (3-4 years) anthelmintic, mebendazole (Vermox R), which is very effective against Ascaris, hookworm and Trichuris, which are the most common parasites in the Marshallese. The drug is quite safe with virtually no side effects since it is not absorbed. The plan is to carry out the program on Rongelap as a test island as follows:

In June, Knudsen would get a small stool specimen (to be analyzed later by Dr. Krotoski) on each individual, to be followed by 1 tablet mebendazole (100 mg), b.i.d. for three days. This treatment would be repeated on three quarterly surveys followed by reanalysis of stools - Ortho Pharmaceuticals has agreed to provide the drug free of charge for this purpose. If the results are satisfactory, this program could be of great value to the Trust Territory Health Services for other use in the islands.

Dr. Knudsen says he heard that Bakol and Bakol lawyers are going to the U.S. Senate Committee, which will review the Burton bill passed by the House of Representatives, presumably to influence them on behalf of the Utirik people.

Knud also heard that two more exposed Rongelap people will be going to Japan for medical examinations under the auspices of Ataji Balos. I guess this may be in order for the leftist Japanese anti-A and H bomb groups to get more fuel for their big Hiroshima Day rally. I

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understand there will be a big international meeting there at that time, including medical reviews of A bomb effects. Dr. Hayakawa tells me that the group is planning on writing a letter to President Carter about the Marshallese exposed to fallout.

The briefing for Mr. A. Winkel, the new High Commissioner, and Mrs. Ruth Van Cleve, the new Director of the Office of Territories, will take place on June 2nd and I have been asked to review the medical studies in the Marshalls. This will be done in advance of the UN meeting of the Trusteeship Council scheduled, I believe, for the second week in June. I hear Oscar deBrum will be at the UN meeting.

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