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MEDICINE - JAN. - DEC. 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR CHAIRMAN SEABORG

THROUGH GENERAL MANAGER

SUBJECT: THYROID DISEASE IN RONGELAP ISLANDERS

During the February 1964 annual medical survey of the Marshallese Islanders exposed to fallout from the March 1, 1954, shot over Bikini, three young teenagers, 13-14 years old, were found to have nodules in their thyroid glands. The medical team felt that two of them should have immediate thyroidectomies, and these operations were successfully carried out at the Naval Hospital on Guam with the full cooperation of the Trust Territory people and the medical services of the Department of Defense.

The pathological diagnoses were papillary adenocarcinomas, a malignant tumor of the thyroid. The prognosis, of course, is uncertain, but the surgeons are reported to have felt that they may have removed all the neoplastic tissue. While this information has not been transmitted formally, it is regarded as reliable. It is planned that a ten year summary of the health status of the exposed Marshallese, including these recent developments, will be prepared for prompt publication in a prominent journal such as the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Preparations are now going ahead to have the third child with a small nodule operated on as soon as possible. The estimated doses to these thyroids are some 100 to 175 rads external gamma plus 100 to 150 rads from absorbed radioiodine.

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Since the spontaneous occurrence of two, and possibly three, cases of thyroid neoplasm among the small number of exposed Marshallese children is most unlikely, these observations will probably give rise to comment in various quarters. For this reason, it seems desirable to consider this matter as tentative until the documented data are in hand. You and the Commission will be informed promptly at that time.

C. L. Dunham, M.D.
Director
Division of Biology and Medicine

cc: Commissioner Bunting
Commissioner Palfrey
Commissioner Ramey
Commissioner Tape

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