

January 28, 1970

Dr. Joseph F. Fraumeni  
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Bethesda, Maryland 20014

Dear Dr. Fraumeni:

I read with great interest your report on "Cancer Mortality Among Chemists" in the November 1969 issue of the Journal of the NCI. Would you favor me with a reprint?

In fact, I would like to press you to attempt some further refinement of your study with particular reference to cancer of the pancreas. Perhaps I am reacting the more vehemently in response to the tragic and premature death from this cause not long ago of a cherished and respected friend and colleague, Dr. Harriett Ephrussi-Taylor.

It occurred to me that it might be profitable to trace a profile of the professional sub-specialties of individual chemists who had died of this particular disease, or of another category to be sure, which might then be compared to the general profile of the population that you had sampled, or that characteristic of some of the other disease categories. This might give at least some hint as to specific etiological agents.

The one insult that I see many professional chemists exposing themselves to is fumes from solvents, for example, as used in chromatography. Here I would particularly focus on pyridine. Perhaps the simplest characterization to attempt would be any long period of exposure to organic solvents. It is probably true that professionals allow themselves to be exposed to a variety of agents which would be proscribed under typical industrial regulations for non-professional workers.

I would be glad to be of some assistance for this if there is any particular contribution that I could make. For example, if you could properly send me the list of names of some fifty or a hundred people covering a couple of groups, without identifying the cause of death, I could scan through American Men of Science and various bibliographic sources to offer a judgment about the likelihood of that kind of exposure. Or you might do this yourself without very great difficulty, by attempting to classify the major professional preoccupation of each case as among organic chemistry, physical chemistry, etc. I do not expect this to give any very conclusive results, but I would think that even some reasonable hints would be worth having.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics

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