



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

BETHESDA 14, MD.

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH
O Liver 6-4000

APR 22 1959

Dear Mr. Fogarty:

I am very glad to reply to your letter of April 13 forwarding a copy of the letter from Mr. Frederick E. Teal of Berwyn, Pennsylvania on the subject of magnesia products as possible causes of cancer. It may interest you to know that Senator Neuberger recently referred a similar letter from Mr. Teal to the Department.

Prevention is one of the most important aspects of the cancer problem. The National Cancer Institute is both conducting and supporting research to discover agents or substances contacted in our daily living which may be cancer-causing. As you know, the last Congress enacted H. R. 13254, which became Public Law 85-929 with the approval of the President on September 6, 1958. This was an act amending the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to prohibit the use in food of additives which have not been adequately tested to establish their safety.

I believe that Mr. Teal's anxiety over cancer hazards in the widespread use of magnesia products is unwarranted. At the present time there is no scientific evidence incriminating orally given magnesium compounds as carcinogenic agents. A number of these, such as milk of magnesia (which is magnesium hydroxide), magnesium carbonate, magnesium oxide, magnesium sulfate, and magnesium trisilicate, are used for various medicinal purposes and are usually taken by mouth.

The various types of asbestos are complex magnesium silicates often combined with iron, calcium or sodium, materials of a different nature than those used in medications referred to by Mr. Teal. When asbestos fibers are inhaled

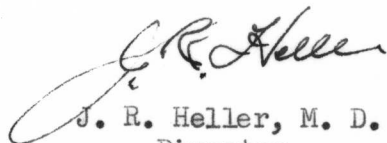
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they can cause a chronic dust disease of the lungs called asbestosis. In the presence of asbestosis the liability to the development of cancer of the lung is about 15- to 25-fold that of a comparable population. Results of scientific studies have been made available to the asbestos industry, and steps have been taken to prevent inhalation by employees working with the material.

A paper dealing with the control of cancer through research, diagnosis, prevention and treatment which I presented in London in July 1958 may be of interest to Mr. Teal. Two copies are enclosed.

I trust that this information will meet your needs.

Sincerely yours,



J. R. Heller, M. D.
Director
National Cancer Institute

Hon. John E. Fogarty
House of Representatives
Washington 25, D.C.

Enclosures