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AIR MAIL

Dr. W. A. Altemeier
Professor of Surgery
Cincinnati General Hospital
Cincinnati 29, Ohio

S.G.O.

CO4(Cincinnati Gen Hosp - Cincinnati, Ohio)P

Dear Doctor Altemeier:

For some time, the professional staff of this office has been aware that a gap exists in our research program and in knowledge regarding the effects of chronic, continuous ionizing radiation at low dosage levels. It is conceivable that the use of nuclear weapons in any future war may generate a background of continuous radiation in which people must live, work, and fight. Of course, no one can know at present the dosage level of this radiation, but it has been imagined that it could be as high as 30 r a week, which, as you know, is now about the average human lifetime dosage.

Most of the available data on ionizing radiation pertain to the effects of acute dosage in the L.D. 50 to L.D. 100 range. It appears that we do not know what a chronic low dosage of ionizing radiation like that described above does to immunity, blood coagulation, wound healing, infection, nutrition, and all of the other factors with which we are concerned in the care of combat or similar casualties. Knowing little of these effects we must know even less regarding what to do about them. It is conceivable that our present concepts of managing combat casualties, which include debridement, delayed suture, and antibiotic prophylaxis, should be revised considerably in the imagined situation in which the casualty has been and is being subjected to the type of radiation described.

I do not believe that we in the military should be concerned with the genetic effects of radiation, but we should have the answers to some of the more immediate problems which have been implied. We may soon have some additional funds to support and be in a position to consider research proposals along the line I hope I have suggested.

We are exploring the possibilities of obtaining such proposals from the best sources and would like to invite any suggestions you may have upon this matter.

Yours very sincerely,

HAROLD F. HAMIT
Lt Colonel, Medical Corps
Chief, Surgical Research Branch
Research and Development Division

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