

"1946 Lorillard letter acknowledging the possibility of the presumption that tobacco use contributes to cancer (Pit. Exh. G(4))"

CONFIDENTIAL

File: MD-02

July 29, 1946

Mr. A. Raifner, Secretary
Committee on Manufacture,
P. Lorillard Company
New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

We have read with a great deal of interest the article appearing in the August 1946 edition of "Reader's Digest", entitled "Cigarettes Cause Cancer" You will recall that this is the article referred to in your letter to us of July 24th, as well as in the newspaper clipping and memorandum from our advertising agency, which you were kind enough to send along in addition to the aforementioned magazine.

In brief, the article claims that many types of cancer are caused by tobacco smoke, and more specifically by a rare organic compound, called benzpyrene, which is claimed to exist in tobacco tar. In other words, benzpyrene is presumed to be a combustion product of burning tobacco, and by animal experiments, it has been shown to possess definite carcinogenic properties. Naturally this makes a very sensational story, and presents a serious indictment against the use of cigarettes, cigars, or pipe.

Certain scientists and medical authorities have claimed for many years that the use of tobacco contributed to cancer development in susceptible people. Just enough evidence has been presented to justify the possibility of such a presumption. However, so little is known about the causes of cancer that no one can say with absolute authority, that tobacco usage is any more a cause of cancer than many other potential factors. Pinning cancer development on benzpyrene in tobacco smoke presents a new angle, and we doubt that enough is known about this to try to prove or refute the claims rendered.

We believe that you can appreciate that it would be a big task to confirm or disprove the significance of benzpyrene in tobacco smoke. In other words, the first job would be to prove whether or not it actually exists in tobacco tar obtained under normal circumstances. Next it would be necessary to repeat the experimental work on animals to be sure that it possessed carcinogenic properties. Finally, and assuming that the first

-1-

Basic: Ltr. to Mr., Riafner, subj: "Cigarettes Cause Cancer? " dtd 7/29/46

two steps turn out affirmatively, it would then be necessary to develop ways and means of keeping it, as well as other irritating substances, out of the smoke from our own specific products.

You can readily appreciate that this is a big order, and under- stand why we are unable to comment more specifically on the whole matter at the present time. We wish to mention, however, that a better understanding of problems of this kind is what we hope to acquire from the fellowship program recently established at Ohio State University. In other words, as time goes on we hope that the Chemistry project will throw light on the [rarer?] compounds existing in cigarette smoke, such as benzprene, and that the physiology program, when initiated, will give us a better insight on subjects, such as throat irritation and even carcinogenesis.

Very truly yours,

H. B. Parmele, Chemist

MIDDLETON BRANCH

P. LORILLARD COMPANY

[NB: By 1951 Dr. Harris B. Parmele had advanced to become Director of Research for P. Lorillard and was working to develop the infamous asbestos-containing 'Micronite' filter for the new cigarette meant to combat fears of "health conscious smokers": Kent.

According to Kluger's "Ashes to Ashes," p. 151):

Introduced at the very time the Federal Trade Commission was cracking down on the older brands for false claims of mildness and nonirritability, the Kent was positioned by Lorillard, in effect, the first authentically safe-guarded cigarette on the market and its Micronite filter "The Greatest Health Protection in Cigarette History." In truth, the Kent filter permitted only about half as much tar and nicotine to reach the smoker's mouth as any other brand, and because, after testing it, research director Parmele had assumed the asbestos to be so tightly bound into the filter that it could not escape from the smoke, the first Kent ads stated that the Micronite was made of "a pure, dust-free, completely harmless material," so safe it was used to filter air in hospitals.]

DrFarrahCancerCenter.com