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## The Marshallese Radiological Surveys: Who REALLY Benefits?

By Glenn Alcalay

The Marshallese who were exposed to radioactive fallout on March 1, 1954 have been continually monitored by a group of U.S. scientists from Brookhaven National Laboratory. During the past several years, the Marshallese have become increasingly suspicious about the nature of these scientific surveys, and on two separate occasions the residents of Rongelap and Utirik Atolls have refused to allow the scientists onto their islands. The following will be a discussion of some of the factors responsible for the growing distrust on the part of the Marshallese.

The single most blatant factor causing distrust on the part of the Marshallese is the fact that the examining doctors do not provide medical care for the entire community. When the Brookhaven doctors spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and come all the way out to the outer islands in the Marshalls in order to see merely a fraction of the population, the people have much difficulty understanding the reasons for the medical program. Throughout the past decades of the Marshalls medical program, numerous people have been turned away by the doctors because they were not included in the group designated as having been originally exposed to radiation.

A case in point stems from the fact that over 30% of the Utirik population suffers from adult-onset type diabetes, as diagnosed by the Brookhaven doctors several years ago. Because this disease is believed to be unrelated to the radiation-related diseases (such as thyroid neoplasms, leukemia, life-shortening, etc.), the Brookhaven doctors have not treated the diabetes in the Utirik population because they say that it is "not their responsibility." In an almost sardonic gesture, the doctors have even brought "gifts" of sugar to these people who suffer from diabetes, rather than instruct them about the need to restrict their sugar intake and revise their diet in general. It is small wonder the Marshallese have become distrustful, and they now question the relevance of the Brookhaven medical program when so many of their medical needs are not being treated.

A few years ago, Brookhaven hired a young and ambitious physician by the name of Kourad Kotrady to assist with the Marshalls medical program. Fortunately (for the Marshallese), Kotrady acted very humanely toward the Marshallese by going outside the prescribed bounds of the Brookhaven program and helped to deliver general health care for all of the residents of Utirik and Rongelap. Because Kotrady was so successful in penetrating the long-standing Brookhaven/Marshallese

barrier by providing general health care for these unfortunate victims of U.S. aggression, he was forced to terminate his contract with Brookhaven mid-way through his proposed tenure. Kotrady's love and concern for the Marshallese merely pointed out the contradictions and inadequacies of the medical program, and his humanism drew attention to the cold and scientific nature of the past Marshalls medical program.

By simple comparison, the former Brookhaven physician assigned to the Marshalls (Dr. Knud Knudsen) was seen as uncaring and aloof in his concern for the Marshallese, as contrasted with Kotrady's dynamic proposals for treating the people. The difference might be attributed to the fact that Kotrady is a **clinician** and is trained to interact with patients, while Knudsen is a **researcher** who specializes in hypertension. Whatever the reason, the Marshallese do not care to be treated by Knudsen, and only after several confrontations with the Brookhaven doctors did the Marshallese finally convince Brookhaven to replace Knudsen.

### No Cooperation From Brookhaven

The last point to be made here concerns the way in which the Marshallese have been kept ignorant of their condition for more than two decades. When I became involved in the attempt to enhance the Utirik peoples' understanding of their situation between 1975-77, I received open hostility and no cooperation from the Brookhaven doctors, particularly from Dr. Robert Conard. It was this hostility which led me to conclude that something was drastically wrong with the medical program, and as I had overheard Dr. Conard say to a colleague, I had "opened up a can of worms."

It is now clear to me that Conard has kept these people ignorant for all these years so that he can conduct his scientific studies with a minimum of interference from the outside world. It is no accident that the Japanese doctors from Hiroshima Memorial was not granted entry visas in 1971 in order to conduct an independent survey of the irradiated Marshallese. Hopefully, the days of Conard's clandestine Marshallese studies are coming to an end as more people learn of the plight of the irradiated Marshallese.

(Glenn Alcalay was a Peace Corps Volunteer on Utirik Atoll from 1975-77. He testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Energy in June 1977 on behalf of the Utirik Council and presently is attending Rutgers University working toward his PhD.)

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