

Introduction to the



Alan McMillan, Gary Sanders, Ken Groves, and Michael Yesley

In January 1994, Laboratory Director Sig Hecker announced the formation of the Human Studies Project Team under the sponsorship of the newly organized Environment, Safety, and Health Division. The team was formed in support of the Department of Energy's openness initiative and in response to the public outcry concerning media stories that linked human radiation studies to Los Alamos. Sig felt it was essential to find and release all relevant documents as quickly as possible so that the public could evaluate the various accusations and assess the science and the ethics of those human radiation experiments in which Los Alamos had been involved.



Dennis Erickson

The Human Studies Project Team was staffed by a number of Laboratory scientific and administrative personnel, some of whom were retirees who had been involved in the experiments in question. Ethicists Joan Gibson from University of New Mexico and John Carey from St. John's College were brought in to enhance the team's social and ethical awareness. Representatives from state government were also invited to attend meetings. The primary objective was to search for, review and catalogue, and release to the public any documents from the Laboratory's records holdings that related to radiation and human experimentation.



George Voelz

Team members poured over hundreds of thousands of pages of documents from the Laboratory's archives, records center, and report library. Retirees reviewed personal notes and document collections. Many people expected that we would find horror stories. We didn't! What we did find was a lot of evidence that Wright Langham, Louis Hempelmann, and their contemporaries were solid scientists and caring individuals. They worked at a feverish pace to provide a high level of safety to people working with plutonium and other radioactive materials. It is hard to believe that Langham or Hempelmann would purposely neglect the people involved in any of their studies. The highest radiotracer doses, aside from the plutonium injections, were the tritium doses Langham gave to himself during a study to construct a bioassay model for monitoring people working with tritium. Wright wanted answers before people got hurt. Earlier, during the intense pressures of the Manhattan Project, Dr. Hempelmann constantly defended the rights of the workers to a safe and healthy work environment.



Clara Salazar, Cecilia Barrone, and Eulalia Newton



John Taschner

Somewhere in the feverish pace, the plutonium injectees were forgotten by physicians, scientists, the military, and the politicians. In the scientific literature, each subject became a nameless, faceless statistic identified by an acronym such as HP-3 or CHI-1. Aside from some media sensationalism, journalist Eileen Welsome should be thanked for bringing forward the names and faces of the plutonium injectees. We will never really know what, if any, consent was involved, and we cannot hide behind the fact that the experiments were well thought out, and the injected plutonium caused no harm. It is evident that people were used and then forgotten.

Human Studies Project

William C. Inkret

This introduction is not complete without some comments on my predecessors who also served as leaders of the Human Studies Project Team. During the initial public outcry, Alan McMillan, our first leader, used his considerable communication skills, gained as a federal regulator, to show the world we were very serious about our task and were performing it honestly. Gary Sanders, who took over in the summer of 1994, used a physicist's approach to hone a fine edge on the then battle-hardened team. Openness and sensitivity to the rights of the individual and the local communities were Gary's prime concerns. In the fall of 1994, Ken Groves, a broadly experienced health physicist, took over as the team began to interact with the President Clinton's Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments. Ken successfully guided us during the period when a mistake would have had major political fallout. Attorney Michael Yesley took on the leadership role in December 1994, and his tireless efforts were crucial to the publication of a high quality report by the President's Advisory Committee.

The articles that follow were written by several of the team's scientist/retirees who worked on different aspects of radiation studies involving human subjects. Their stories give some insight into the practices and needs of the period from 1943 to the early 1980s. In light of the many unfounded accusations cast their way, these individuals have shown much courage and stamina both as team members and as authors. They are good people and outstanding scientists. They have followed the rules, used integrity in their judgements, and provided invaluable scientific information for the good of humankind. They have weathered a lot of pain and hurt; here they have a chance to provide some history and insight.

The individuals in the photos on these two pages were members of the Human Studies Project Team with the exception of Duncan Thomas and Marissa Caputo of the President's Advisory Committee and Staff and journalist Eileen Welsome. Although not shown here, team members Lynn Cline, Carmen Gallegos, and Chris C'de Baca deserve special thanks for maintaining administrative continuity through the many stages and leadership changes of this unique project.

Finally, grateful acknowledgment is extended to Dennis Erickson, who, as Director for Environment, Safety, and Health, served as institutional champion for this project throughout its existence. Denny provided unflinching support, demanded rigor and quality, and always found ways to recognize excellence.■



Eileen Welsome and Joan Gibson



Bill Moss and Duncan Thomas



Bill Inkret



*Michael Yesley and
Marissa Caputo*



Clarence Courtright



Margo Clark



Don Petersen