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**CABINET**

**TOBACCO SMOKING AND CANCER OF THE LUNG**

**MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER OF HEALTH**

It is necessary, because of the deep public interest in all matters concerning cancer, to bring to the attention of my colleagues the question of the relationship between tobacco smoking and lung cancer. This matter was considered by the Home Affairs Committee on 5th February, when it was agreed that an early public statement should be made in the House of Commons (H.A. (54) 3rd Meeting, Item 2).

2. Briefly the position is that my Standing Advisory Committee on Cancer and Radiotherapy have had the question before it since early in 1951, following the appearance of an article in the medical press which suggested that the statistical evidence showed a relationship between smoking and lung cancer. At first the Committee were sceptical; but further statistical evidence has since emerged, as well as counter-arguments from the Imperial Tobacco Company, and this has all been considered by a panel under the Chairmanship of the Government Actuary. As a result, the Committee have now advised me in the following terms:—

“ Having considered the report of the panel under the Chairmanship of the Government Actuary on the statistical evidence of an association between smoking and cancer of the lung, and having reviewed the other evidence available to them, the Committee are of opinion:—

- (1) It must be regarded as established that there is a relationship between smoking and cancer of the lung.
- (2) Though there is a strong presumption that the relationship is causal, there is evidence that the relationship is not a simple one, since:—
  - (a) the evidence in support of the presence in tobacco smoke of a carcinogenic agent causing cancer of the lung is not yet certain;
  - (b) the statistical evidence indicates that it is unlikely that the increase in the incidence of cancer of the lung is due entirely to increases in smoking;
  - (c) the difference in incidence between urban and rural areas and between different towns, suggest that other factors may be operating, *e.g.*, atmospheric pollution, occupational risks.
- (3) Although no immediate dramatic fall in death-rates could be expected if smoking ceased, since the development of lung cancer may be the result of factors operating over many years, and although no reliable quantitative estimates can be made of the effect of smoking on the incidence of cancer of the lung, it is desirable that young people should be warned of the risks apparently attendant on excessive smoking. It would appear that the risk increases with the amount smoked, particularly of cigarettes.”

3. I should also mention that the Medical Research Council have recently received an offer from certain British tobacco companies to put up £250,000 for research into the causation of cancer of the lung, and the offer is under consideration.

4. Research so far undertaken both here and in the United States has not identified any cancer-producing substance in tobacco smoke. It seems certain that several factors or a combination of them are responsible for lung cancer, and not only smoking—the disease occurs in non-smokers. But the statistical evidence does seem to indicate that there is a causal relationship between smoking and lung cancer, even if we do not know how or to what extent one causes the other.

5. In view of the wide public interest in this question, the tobacco companies' offer of research funds, and the fact that it may at any time become widely known that I have advice from my Standing Advisory Committee, I feel bound to make an early statement. The Home Affairs Committee accepted this view, and remitted to a Sub-Committee (consisting of the Lord President, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Financial Secretary, Treasury and myself) consideration of the form of the statement and of the question of accepting the tobacco companies' offer of funds. I expect to be in a position to report orally to my colleagues the conclusions of the Sub-Committee at the meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday, 10th February.

I. M.

*Ministry of Health, W.1,  
8th February, 1954.*