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CONFIDENTIALC.P.(56) 99COPY NO. 4916th April, 1956.CABINET
-----CANCER OF THE LUNGMemorandum by the Minister of Health

Two years ago the Cabinet authorised my predecessor to make a statement in the House of Commons on 12th February, 1954, on advice he had received on the relationship between smoking and cancer of the lung. (C.C.(54) 8th Conclusions, Minute 9). Recently I have been pressed both within and without the House to bring that statement up to date.

2. Accordingly in a paper to the Home Affairs Committee (H.P.(56) 49) I set out the developments which have taken place during the past two years and a proposed reply to a Parliamentary Question. The Committee were in general agreement with my proposals but decided that the matter was one which should go before the Cabinet before any action was taken. (H.P.(56) 9th Meeting, Item 5).

3. Briefly, the position is that my Standing Medical Advisory Committee have, with the concurrence of the Central Health Services Council, now advised me that appropriate action should be taken as a matter of urgency constantly to inform the public of the known connection between smoking and cancer of the lung, and of the risks involved in heavy smoking.

4. Since the previous Statement:

- (a) Deaths from cancer of the lung have increased from 15,132 in 1953 to 17,271 in 1955.
- (b) Papers published in other countries have confirmed the view that patients with lung cancer are less often non-smokers and more often heavy smokers than patients with other diseases.
- (c) Studies here and in the U.S.A. have shown that mortality from lung cancer increases progressively from the group of non-smokers to the group of heavy smokers (particularly of cigarettes, pipe smoking being less harmful) and that mortality is reduced by stopping smoking. Results indicate that the relative mortality amongst non-smokers is 0.3 per thousand, whereas amongst heavy smokers it is 6.1 per thousand.

- (d) Recently the authors of a large scale study in North Wales and Liverpool concluded that the elimination of cigarette smoking might reduce the male lung cancer death rates in the rural area of North Wales by over four-fifths and in Liverpool by one-half, while elimination of some local factor in Liverpool (possibly atmospheric pollution) might reduce the rate there by a further three-eighths.
- (e) Two cancer producing substances have been identified in tobacco smoke (3:4-benzpyrene and arsenious oxide). There is so far no evidence that either produces cancer of the lung. The Chairman of the Medical Research Council's Committee on this subject has stated:-

"The fact that a causal agent has not yet been recognised should, in my opinion, not be allowed to confuse the main issue, namely, that there is a statistical association between cigarette smoking and the incidence of lung cancer which (again in my opinion) is so massive as to be incontrovertible; and the simplest explanation of which is that there is a causal connection between the two".

5. I seek my colleagues' approval to my giving a Parliamentary Answer on 30th April in the terms set out in the Appendix to this paper.

R.H.T.

Ministry of Health, W.1.,

16th April, 1956.

APPENDIX

Proposed Parliamentary Answer on Tobacco Smoking and Cancer of the Lung

I have been reviewing this subject in the light of the latest evidence available and of the advice of my advisory bodies; and I wish at this stage to make a full statement of progress to bring matters up to date.

2. The House will recall that on 12th February, 1954, my predecessor, my Rt. Hon. Friend the Minister of Labour and National Service, made a statement which indicated that the statistical evidence pointed to a presumption of a causal relationship between smoking and lung cancer, and also to other factors such as atmospheric pollution; but that no causal connection had been scientifically established and that more research was needed.

3. The position to-day is that further statistical evidence in this and other countries has strengthened the presumption that smoking, and particularly the heavy smoking of cigarettes, is an important factor in causing lung cancer, and also that other factors such as atmospheric pollution play a part. Two known carcinogenic agents have been identified in tobacco smoke, but whether they have a direct role in producing lung cancer, and if so what, has not been proved.

4. Statistically it seems clear that the heavier the smoking the greater the risk, that cigarette smoking carries with it a greater risk than pipe smoking and that by giving up smoking the risk can be materially reduced. But it is still true that there is not yet any scientifically conclusive proof established by research, which goes steadily on. That being so, I do not feel able to go further at present than to make these facts known. I shall of course keep the House fully informed of any further developments.