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SECRETC.P. (56) 111COPY NO. 481st May, 1956

## CABINET

CANCER OF THE LUNGMemorandum by the Lord Privy Seal

In accordance with the recent Cabinet decision (C. M. (56) 30th Conclusions, Minute 7), I have discussed cancer of the lung with the Lord President, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the Minister of Health.

2. We have agreed that the Minister of Health cannot defer a statement for very long, not only because of his statutory duty to divulge advice which he receives from the Standing Medical Advisory Committee, but also because of the increasing degree of public concern.

3. Nevertheless, any statement on this subject should not involve the Government too deeply in responsibility for dealing with the possible consequences of excessive smoking. From the point of view of social hygiene, cancer of the lung is not a disease like tuberculosis; nor should the Government assume too lightly the odium of advising the general public on their personal tastes and habits where the evidence of the harm which may result is not conclusive.

4. We feel, therefore, that the Minister's statement should, as far as possible, rest, without comment, upon the views of the medical experts, and it should aim to hold the balance evenly between unnecessarily alarming public opinion, and dismissing the whole question as unimportant. A statement falling between these two extremes would be as clear as can be expected in the present state of our knowledge, and should also take care of the substantial Treasury interest involved.

5. The results of the latest researches by Dr. Doll and Professor Hill are thought likely to be published within the next month or two. Any Government statement should, if possible, anticipate this publication; and it should do so with the minimum of ostentation - i. e., preferably by way of an ordinary Parliamentary Question rather than by means of a full-blown statement.

6. The Minister of Health has an opportunity to answer a Question of this kind on 7th May, after which it will be a good many weeks before he can rely on being reached again in the ordinary course of Questions. I suggest, therefore, that he should be authorised to give the answer which is appended to this paper, and has been drafted on the basis of

the principles indicated above. It incorporates amendments suggested by the Lord President and the Chancellor of the Exchequer since I held my meeting with the interested Ministers.

R.A.B.

Office of the Lord Privy Seal,  
S.W.1.

1st May, 1956.

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DRAFT PARLIAMENTARY ANSWER

Since my predecessor made a statement in February, 1954, investigations into the possible connection of smoking and cancer of the lung have been proceeding in this and other countries. Two known cancer producing 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.

2. The extent of the problem should be neither minimised nor exaggerated. The number of deaths from cancer of the lung has risen from 2,286 in 1931 to 17,271 last year. To place the figures in perspective - in 1954, for men aged 45-74, out of every thousand deaths 77 were from bronchitis, 85 were from cancer of the lung and 112 were from strokes and apoplexies. Deaths of women from cancer of the lung are still not very significant and represent a small fraction of the total.

3. The Chairman of a Committee of the Medical Research Council which has been investigating the subject considers that the fact that a causal agent has not yet been recognised should not be allowed to obscure the fact that there is, statistically, an incontrovertible association between cigarette smoking and the incidence of lung cancer. The statistical evidence from this and other countries to which he refers tends to show that mortality from cancer of the lung is twenty times greater amongst heavy cigarette smokers than amongst non-smokers.

4. The Government consider that the public should be kept informed of all the relevant information as and when it becomes available as the result of research which goes steadily forward with full Government support.