



(c) crown copyright

(THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT)

---

SECRET

C.(57) 135

COPY NO. 56

4th June, 1957

CABINET

CANCER OF THE LUNG

Memorandum by the Secretary of State  
for the Home Department and Lord Privy Seal

In May last year the Cabinet authorised the former Minister of Health to make a statement to the House, in which he gave an undertaking that the public should be kept informed of all relevant information on the relation of smoking and lung cancer (C.M.(56) 32nd Conclusions, Minute 5). The then Lord President later asked the Medical Research Council to review the evidence on this matter and to prepare a statement of their considered assessment of the significance of present knowledge.

2. The report of the Medical Research Council has now been presented and shows that, in their view, the most reasonable interpretation of the evidence so far obtained is that the relationship is one of direct cause and effect. This is the first time that the Medical Research Council have made a positive statement of this nature and they propose to issue it to the medical Press for publication on 28th June.

3. The Committee appointed by the Cabinet to recommend what policy the Government should adopt has considered a statement which the Minister of Health might make to the House on 27th June; a draft is appended. This foreshadows the publication of the Medical Research Council statement and it is proposed therefore that copies of this should be available the same evening in the Vote Office for the information of members.

4. I ask my colleagues to agree to the terms of the statement to be made by the Minister of Health.

R.A.B.

Home Office, S.W.1.

4th June, 1957

APPENDIXDRAFT STATEMENT

In their Annual Report, and more particularly in their special report on tobacco smoking and cancer of the lung (which will be available in the Vote Office at 6.0 p. m. this evening), the Medical Research Council have advised the Government that the most reasonable interpretation of the very great increase in deaths from lung cancer in males during the past twenty-five years is that a major part of it is caused by smoking tobacco, particularly in the form of cigarettes. The Council point to the evidence derived from investigations in many countries in support of this conclusion, in particular to identification of several carcinogenic substances in tobacco smoke.

2. The Government feel that it is their duty to ensure that this latest authoritative opinion is brought effectively to public notice, so that everyone may know the risks involved in smoking. The Government consider that these facts should be made known to all those with responsibility for health education. The Minister of Education included in his recently published Handbook for Teachers on Health Education advice about the dangers of smoking and he is circulating copies of this statement to local education authorities and education authorities generally. Corresponding action will be taken by the Scottish Education Department in Scotland. The Government now propose to bring these views to the notice of the local health authorities who are concerned under statute in the prevention of illness and who are responsible for health education as a means of prevention. Local health authorities will be asked to take appropriate steps to inform the general public and in this task they will have the assistance of the Central Councils for Health Education.

3. Once the risks are known everyone who smokes will have to measure them and make up his or her own mind, and must be relied upon as a responsible person to act as seems best.

4. The Medical Research Council are at present supporting an extensive programme of work designed to discover the way in which tobacco smoke exerts its effect and the relative importance of other factors, such as atmospheric pollution, which may also play a part in the causation of lung cancer. The recent expansion of this programme has been greatly assisted by a substantial grant made in 1954 by a leading group of tobacco manufacturers; on the advice of my predecessor, the present Minister of Labour, this sum was given to the Medical Research Council with complete discretion as to the choice of research projects to be supported and to the publication of results.

5. The work at present in progress consists largely of chemical and biological studies of the many different constituents of tobacco smoke and atmospheric pollution. In addition, surveys of the role of atmospheric pollution and of specific industrial hazards in the causation of the disease are being undertaken. Work along these lines is being supported in many centres in different parts of the country and the Council have also established as part of their own organisation three new research groups in Exeter, London and Sheffield, where long-term studies of different aspects of the problem are being carried out. Every opportunity will be taken by the Medical Research Council to pursue any promising new lines of research which may become apparent.