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CANCER OF LUNGS CALLED 'EPIDEMIC'

Cases Up 4-Fold in 25 Years, Expert Tells Coast Forum —Uncertain on Smoking

TREND IS HELD UPWARD

Disease Declared to Be Most Common in City, With Rise Far Greater Among Men

By MURRAY ILLSON
Special to The New York Times.

SAN FRANCISCO, June 2—Lung cancer was declared here today to have become an epidemic disease that still had not reached a peak.

The assertion was by Dr. Lester Breslow, chief of the Bureau of Chronic Diseases, California Department of Public Health. He emphasized that he used the term "epidemic" because of the mounting incidence of lung cancer and not necessarily to imply contagion.

Speaking at the eighty-second annual forum of the National Conference of Social Work, he said that lung cancer was causing more than 22,000 deaths a year in the country and that its frequency had more than quadrupled in twenty-five years.

He added that it was causing more deaths than tuberculosis.

"If this disease had increased in a period of twenty-five weeks instead of twenty-five years," he observed, "consider the excitement that would have occurred. The fact that an epidemic of cancer stretches out over years rather than weeks tends to dull our sensitivity to it."

Increase Declared 'Real'

Dr. Breslow contended that the increase in the disease could not be explained by citing that people were living longer and hence were more likely to develop it or that physicians were better able now to diagnose it, thus increasing its incidence statistically.

The increase is "real and substantial," he asserted.

The available evidence indicates, he said, that lung cancer is "a disease of the environment," that it "must be a reflection of changes" in man's living conditions. Studies in the United States, England and Denmark all indicate, he added, that lung cancer is much more prevalent in urban communities than in rural areas.

He declared that the evidence "incriminates" various occupations. He listed various mining operations, smelting, welding, asbestos work, painting, metal fabrication and restaurant cooking and said that the disease had increased two-and-a-half times more rapidly among men than among women.

As for cigarette smoking as a possible factor in the increase of the disease, he held that it "does not explain all lung cancer."

Dr. Morton L. Levin, assistant commissioner for medical services of the New York State Department of Health, reviewed the evidence on smoking. He said that "some cases of lung cancer occurred in persons who had never smoked."

'Known' Evidence on Smoking

He added that, from what was known, "we can only point to the fact that cigarette smoking is one of the factors which influences the occurrence of lung cancer, that it most probably is not the only factor, and that each person must decide for himself whether the indicated risk is worth taking or not."

Miss Jane Hoey, director of the United States Bureau of Public Assistance in the Administrations of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, was the first recipient tonight of the $1,000 Florina Lasker Social Work Award.

Miss Hoey is now research consultant to the National Tuberculosis Association in New York.

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