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MINISTRY OF HEALTH
Parliament Buildings

Division of Demography

QUEBEC, May 24th, 1949.

Mr. W. H. Soutar,
Asst. to Mine Manager,
Canadian Johns-Manville Co., Limited,
ASBESTOS, P. Q.

Dear Sir:

At your request, I have taken cognizance of the various articles in some newspapers and dealing with the question of the mortality from tuberculosis in the asbestos mining district.

It is my pleasure, and duty I believe, to give my opinion and relative comments on the matter. However, and in the very first place, I wish to emphasize the stand I desire to hold: that I shall confine these comments to the statistical aspect of the problem only.

In the accompanying table, which will be of great assistance in the following study, I have compiled the crude totals of deaths from tuberculosis with those from cancer, violence (all kinds of accidents) and heart diseases. This first comparison is intended to demonstrate that tuberculosis is NOT the leading cause of death in the mining cities, nor in any other. Same table then compares the same totals (and please notice that we are here dealing with totals not rates - the latter being mostly the time wasting for the general public) in Thetford-Mines and Asbestos with those in six other cities where the social and occupational levels are about identical. This "surrogate" comparison is intended to show that the tuberculosis is not heavier in Thetford-Mines or Asbestos than in any city. Finally, same table establishes a third comparison over a period of five years (1943 to 1947, latest available figures), as to prove that if there exists a variation, the

M O R E

letter is merely "annual" and without any significance whatsoever.

Besides all this, the totals are broken down in relation to sex and

this illustrates that, in Thetford-Mines, the number of women dying

from tuberculosis is sometimes larger than the number of men, which

leads us to conclude that the "employment" alone cannot be regarded

as "exposure" to the disease.

Before analyzing some of these data, it seems appropriate

to consider three important facts.

1. The death rate from tuberculosis in Thetford-Mines has

been published as 236.1 in 1944. This rate is exact, but its pub-

lication as such was erroneous in its underlying significance. I

observe that the publication of this rate was made on May 14th, and

wonder why the rate of 1944 has been used and not that of 1945 or

1946, both of which were available? In 1944, the rate of 236.1 for

Thetford-Mines is exact as already explained, but the rate of 1945

is 117.1 and that of 1946, 137.1, both rates being evidently much

lower. Was there any motive for using only the rate of 1944?

From this we observe quite a variation between 1944 and

1945. How does it come that this rate registers such a sharp decline

in one single year? The explanation is that, inclusive of and prior

to 1944, we were (in Canada as a whole) tabulating all deaths by

place of occurrence, while, with 1945 and since, we are now compiling

by place of residence. The latter method is internationally accepted

as a truer picture of any demographic situation. The place of death

does not matter much nowadays that a person can go hundreds of miles

away from home for treatment, but the residence of the deceased is

more logical as a basis for analysis. As a consequence of this, the

rate of 236.1 for Thetford-Mines in 1944 thus includes a certain number

of deaths which occurred in that city of people who were not residents of the city, while the rate of 117.1 in 1945 does consider only deaths of residents of the city, no matter the place of their death. So, when publishing the 1944 rate, a similar explanation should have been provided, and mainly because this rate has been compared with those of Granby and Sorci, in which cities no institution for the treatment of tuberculosis is located. My belief is that the comparison was dishonest.

2. Dealing with rates, either general or specific (i.e. rate is always specific) is somewhat misleading and great precaution has to be used in their production. As a rule, rates are a fair way of study, if derived from a grand total. For instance, when we say that the tuberculosis rate for the province, was in 1946 of 72.1 per 100,000 population, this is easily understood. On the other hand, if such a rate is established for a small population, it has always to be borne in mind that so many factors are being involved that the rates lose its significance. It is much better to work with the crude totals, deaths which everyone understands, and this explains why the enclosed table has been built up with those numbers only.

Now we may consider a few of these numbers and, to abbreviate, only those of 1947. We shall see that in Montford-Minds there were 29 deaths from tuberculosis, 23 from cancer, 1 from violence (all kinds of accidents) and 12 from heart diseases. In that city, tuberculosis thus occupies the second place, not very far ahead of cancer, while heart diseases claimed only three more victims. But when we consider the sex distribution, we find that there were 16 men and 13 women. (Looking at 1946 there were only 27 deaths, 17 men and 10 women). Can we then conclude from this that tuberculosis is the first cause of death amongst the miners?

What is the situation in the other urban centres?

Asbestos : 5 deaths from T.B., 1 against 4 cancer, 4 accidents
and 13 heart diseases.

Valleyfield : 15 T.B., 10 cancer, 6 accidents, 34 heart.

St. Hyacinthe : 15 T.B., 37 cancer, 7 accidents, 63 heart.

Jonquiere : 32 T.B., 9 cancer, 13 accidents, 14 heart, etc.

After all, comparing the mortality of these cities for tuberculosis only, Jonquiere registers 32 deaths, Chicoutimi : 24; St. Hyacinthe and Valleyfield : 15 each against the 29 in Thetford-Mines and the 5 in Asbestos. Is there such an extraordinary prevalence of tuberculosis in the Asbestos Mining district? I think that some other cities register as many, if not more deaths from tuberculosis and the conclusion comes to the mind : Why should only the situation of Thetford-Mines be "publicized" ?

As stated in the beginning, I have confined the above comments to the statistical data only, with the hope that this may be of assistance to all. Statistics are very important but their value is derived from the "objective" which one has in mind.

Yours very truly,
the Demographer,
(signed) Paul Parrot, M.D.

TABLE PREPARED BY PAUL FARECT, M.D. DEMOGRAPHY

Ministry of Health, Parliament Buildings, Quebec

TOTAL DEATHS FROM TUBERCULOSIS, and other comparative causes, from 1943 to 1947, in THETFORD WINES and ASBESTOS, and other comparative cities.

		TUBERCULOSIS			CANCER			VIOLENCE (all kinds of accidents)			HEART		
		T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F
THETFORD WINES	1943	52	24	28	16	11	5	14	11	3	32	23	9
	1944	32	19	13	11	5	6	10	7	3	35	23	12
	1945	16	8	8	13	6	7	7	6	1	37	13	24
	1946	22	7	15	13	7	6	10	10	0	38	18	20
	1947	29	16	13	23	14	9	4	2	2	32	13	14
ASBESTOS	1943	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	6	3	3
	1944	4	3	1	4	0	4	2	0	2	9	2	1
	1945	5	2	3	7	4	3	6	5	1	7	3	4
	1946	5	4	1	5	1	4	4	2	2	7	3	4
	1947	5	0	5	4	2	2	4	4	0	13	9	4
VALLEYFIELD	1943	10	5	5	19	10	9	14	11	3	23	10	13
	1944	17	3	14	21	10	11	9	7	2	43	29	14
	1945	14	8	6	22	10	12	8	7	1	40	25	15
	1946	15	8	7	27	13	14	13	8	5	30	17	13
	1947	15	7	8	19	14	5	6	5	1	34	18	16
ST-HYACINTHE	1943	19	5	14	43	17	26	16	14	2	76	41	35
	1944	19	4	15	40	12	28	10	7	3	74	34	40
	1945	15	5	10	32	11	21	11	5	6	58	34	24
	1946	27	11	16	34	10	24	6	6	0	55	22	33
	1947	15	8	7	37	15	22	7	6	1	63	28	35
LA TUQUE	1943	5	4	1	12	9	3	8	8	0	9	6	3
	1944	13	2	6	6	1	5	8	5	3	16	10	6
	1945	12	6	6	9	6	3	7	6	1	4	1	1
	1946	12	4	2	10	5	5	2	2	1	12	6	6
	1947	7	2	5	10	7	3	4	2	2	12	8	4
RIMOUSKI	1943	60	27	33	17	8	9	10	7	3	12	4	8
	1944	12	3	7	9	4	4	7	4	3	9	3	6
	1945	6	1	5	7	3	4	8	7	1	20	7	13
	1946	11	6	5	16	6	10	2	1	1	16	7	9
	1947	11	2	9	9	6	3	6	2	4	19	12	7
CHICOUTIMI	1943	48	19	29	28	17	11	16	12	1	24	12	12
	1944	20	6	14	10	5	4	15	7	2	14	5	9
	1945	21	8	13	17	8	8	22	16	8	16	7	4
	1946	29	9	15	12	6	6	14	12	2	30	15	17
	1947	24	13	11	25	17	8	23	5	1	32	18	24
JENQUIERE	1943	12	8	4	10	6	7	13	9	7	9	6	7
	1944	29	11	18	15	5	6	6	4	2	14	7	5
	1945	19	10	8	13	5	6	8	8	10	15	7	8
	1946	24	13	11	10	4	6	9	9	9	16	7	11
	1947	32	16	16	9	3	6	13	10	9	11	12	7