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Northeastern Area Has High Cancer Rate

By ROY BODE

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OKLAHOMA CITY — Deaths from lung cancer are more prevalent in the northeastern counties than elsewhere in Oklahoma, two medical researchers reported this week.

Dr. Nabih R. Assal, a specialist in epidemiology, and Dr. Robert D. Lindeman, assistant professor of preventive medicine at the University of Oklahoma, presented their findings in the September issue of the journal of the Oklahoma Medical Association.

Studying Oklahoma deaths from 1956 to 1963, the researchers found "geographic distribution shows lung cancer to be most prevalent in the northeastern counties."

They noted that zinc, lead and coal mining abound in that area and wrote, "The high mortality of respiratory cancer in Oklahoma, a rural state, is a very significant finding."

LUNG CANCER, THEY SAID has increased in the last 20 years until it is presently the most common death-producing cancer among American men.

Cigarette smoking and urban air pollution have been singled out as causes for the upsurge, they said.

In their study, Assal and Linderman found 5,542 persons died from cancer of the respiratory system during their 10-year study period.

The geographic distribution . . . shows the disease to be more prevalent in the northeastern counties of the state extending from Ottawa . . . to Hughes," they observed.

A dramatic increase in the disease during the study period the researchers said, was probably due to new environment factors.

CIGARETTE SALES—AND, probably smoking—have steadily increased over the years, they explained, and population has shifted to metropolitan counties where air pollution is greater.

Most cancer victims, they reported, are men because "either males are more predisposed to cancer of the respiratory system or males are more exposed on environmental carcinogens.

"Most occupations where the risk of lung cancer mortality is increased are predominately male occupations such as mining," they said.

"The association between excessive risk of lung cancer and exposure to radioactive ore mining, nickel refining, chromate, asbestos, gas or tar was definitely established in the study."

OTTAWA COUNTY, WHERE zinc and lead is mined, was pinpointed as an area where lung cancer death rates are among the state's highest.

Washington and Okmulgee counties, said the researchers, are the sites of zinc smelter areas where the prevalence of respiratory malignancies is high.

Noting petroleum and gasoline plants in the central area of the state, they said assessment of air pollution in such areas is difficult but added: "Such an industrial environment may have contributed something to the complex etiology of cancer. . . ."

"The high mortality from cancer of the respiratory system in Oklahoma, a rural state, but a leader in the petroleum industry is a very significant finding," they concluded.

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