

February 12, 1954

MEMORANDUM ON ANNOUNCEMENT BY BRITISH MINISTER OF HEALTH

An important announcement was made today in London by the Minister of Health. This announcement was issued on very short notice and without warning.

Following are highlights of announcement:

"I have now been advised by the Government Committee in the following terms:

1. It is regarded as established that there is a relationship between smoking and cancer of the lung.
2. While there is strong presumption that the relationship is causal, there is evidence that the relationship is not simple. Evidence in support of carcinogenic agent causing cancer of the lung is not yet established. Statistical evidence indicates that it is unlikely that the increased incidence of cancer of the lung is due entirely to smoking. The difference in the incidence of lung cancer between rural and urban areas and in different towns indicates that other factors may be operating.
3. Although no immediate dramatic fall in the death rate could be expected for smokers who have ceased since the development of lung cancer, this may be the result of factors operating over many years; and although there is no reliable quantitative report of the extent of smoking's influence on cancer of the lung, it is desirable that young people should

be warned of the results apparently attendant upon excessive smoking. It would appear that the risk increases with the increase of smoking, particularly of cigarettes.

I accept the Committee's view that this statistical evidence points to smoking as a factor in lung cancer. I would draw attention to the fact that there is so far no form of evidence of the way in which smoking may cause lung cancer and we must look to the results of the research to determine future action. I should also tell the House that before these recommendations were considered, the tobacco companies had offered £250,000 for research. They had, on my advice, agreed to offer this money to the Medical Research Council."

The Minister held a press conference today on his comments. He stated that with regard to the relationship between smoking and lung cancer, the Government recognized the deep public interest in this question. They had therefore decided to expedite publication of the Cancer Committee's report, without over- or under-estimating its gravity. The public was entitled to insist that research be pursued.

The tobacco companies also issued a statement, the gist of which is as follows:

"There is no proof that smoking is a cause of lung cancer. To help the medical research into the cause of the disease, however, we are making available over the next seven years a fund of £250,000.

"Lung cancer occurs in those who have never smoked; and the number of those who have smoked is in very small proportion. There are medical authorities here and in other countries who lay the blame on atmospheric pollution. Until medical science discovers how the disease is caused, it is impossible to prove or disprove that smoking or anything else may contribute to it. The Medical Research Council has been asked by the tobacco manufacturers to apply the fund to such research into the cause of lung cancer as it thinks appropriate."