

Computer to Get Records From Major Cancer Study

A long term, suspenseful study of the lives of 6,137 older men and the deaths of about 1,826 of them is all over but the coding of statistics, which computers will sort out during the next two years.

Some of the lessons learned as to how and why men die were disclosed in a report today by the American Cancer Society, which, with the Philadelphia Tuberculosis and Health Association and the Pennsylvania Thoracic Society, reported the research. The investigation was headed by Dr. Katherine Boucot, Dr.

David A. Cooper, and Dr. William Weiss.

The study, known as the Philadelphia Pulmonary Neoplasia Research Project was begun Dec. 4, 1951, when Philadelphia men over 45 years old began signing up as volunteers. The men agreed to have chest x-rays and answer questions about their symptoms twice a year. The aim of the project was to find out who gets lung cancer and what can be done to save them.

A total of 6,137 reported

regularly for from eight to ten years. Of these, 66 were found to have lung cancer when they signed up for the project; and another 92 developed the disease during the course of the study. The 92 who came down with the lung cancer while under medical investigation commanded the concentrated attention of the scientists.

One of the starkest statistics of the study is the fact that every single one of the 92 who developed lung cancer smoked. None of the 806 non-smokers developed lung cancer.

Smokers with a chronic cough proved to be twice as susceptible to lung cancer as non-coughing smokers.

For 19 out of every 20 lung patients, the disease brings usually speedy death. Whether the project lengthened the survival of any of the men—and if so, by how much—remains to be determined in computer tests.

It is clear from the data, however, that the disease rapidly spread and killed some men while in others the course was slow. Omens of a

fast course included:

(1) Rapid spread of the cancer beyond its point of origin in the lung;

(2) The rapidity with which the cancer doubled in size;

(3) Large size of the cancer when first detected.

Analysis was made of a sample of 12 men who developed cancer within six months after a negative x-ray. There was considerable variation in the growth rate and spreading tendency of these cancers and in the time the men survived. The doubling time of these cancers ranged from two to

ten months. When originally detected, the diameters of the tumors ranged from about one-half to three inches. Survival ranged from 50 months when the cancer was small and grew and spread slowly, to only one month in other cancers.

The patients usually did not die of their lung cancers. They were killed by a metastasis, or spread to some vital structure outside of the lung. Preliminary evaluation of the results are sobering, or jarring, in some respects.

Detection of lung cancer for instance, proved extremely difficult. Reviews of x-ray films showed that the highly qualified experts in this project missed some lung cancers until there had been delays of six months or longer. In almost half the cases, x-ray film readers failed to agree when one diagnosed cancer.

While time is considered of the essence in curing lung cancer, these studies turned up a few disconcerting exceptions. One patient delayed 32 months in having surgery but he lived an amazing total of 50 months. This and another Philadelphia study showed that delay in treatment did not diminish the curvival of

patients. Undoubtedly this is due to those cancers which grow slowly.

However, the "cures" were in the patients diagnosed and operated upon. Since no one can tell about the rate of growth or spread when the cancer is first seen, the doctors feel that it is important to act promptly. Some day, they say, there may be drugs which will be effective so they must keep detection tools in order. That was the story in tuberculosis.

Always be polite to people who disagree with you—after all they have a right to their ridiculous opinions.

—George J. Melvin, Claysville (Penn.) Recorder.

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