

THE JOURNAL

OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION



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Subscription price . . Fifteen dollars per annum in advance
Cable Address "Medic, Chicago"

SMOKING AND LUNG CANCER

A summary of pertinent data relating to smoking and lung cancer appeared in *THE JOURNAL*, Nov. 23, pages 1829 to 1837. Written by Dr. Leroy E. Burney, surgeon general of the Public Health Service, the report documents the major researches and identifies the Public Health Service with those who consider that the evidence to date implicates smoking as the principal etiological factor in the increase in lung cancer. A number of authorities who have examined the same evidence cited by Dr. Burney do not agree with his conclusions. Although the studies reveal a relationship between cigarette smoking and cancer that seems more than coincidental, they do not explain why, even when smoking patterns are the same, case rates are higher among men than among women and among urban than among rural populations. Neither the proponents nor the opponents of the smoking theory have sufficient evidence to warrant the assumption of an all-or-none authoritative position. Until definitive studies are forthcoming, the physician can fulfill his responsibility by watching the situation closely, keeping courant of the facts, and advising his patients on the basis of his appraisal of those facts. The Public Health Service can best meet its obligations by collecting and disseminating data from all sources and making known to the health and medical professions its own evaluations of such data.

J. H. T.