

NEWS RELEASE

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THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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THREE-YEAR PROGRAM STIMULATES TOBACCO-HEALTH RESEARCH

CHICAGO--Is smoking a psychological addiction with deadly overtones or more in the nature of a bad habit?

The best estimate of clinicians and scientists in the field is that cigarets are a health hazard. But they admit they don't have the scientific data yet to establish why and how.

The problem is one that must be answered at the cellular and molecular level. What effect is produced by the molecules that constitute cigaret smoke on the molecules that make up human cells?

For the past three years, wide ranging research into many questions at this level has been sponsored by the Project for Research on Tobacco and Health of the American Medical Association-Education and Research Foundation. But direct and incontrovertible evidence for a cause and effect relationship between smoking and disease--including cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular disease--is difficult to obtain. The answers are probably still years away.

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Nevertheless, the program has already met with a degree of success, according to its architects.

Explains Maurice H. Seevers, M.D., Ph.D., chairman of the Committee for Research on Tobacco and Health: "For one thing, the program has helped stimulate an interest in laboratory research on smoking."

In the past research into the effects of smoking has often been retrospective in nature--attempting to correlate certain diseases with smoking patterns on a statistical basis.

There was, however, only spotty interest among scientists in laboratory investigation of the questions posed by the statistics.

Dr. Seevers, professor and chairman of the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Michigan Medical School, said grants provided under the AMA-ERF program are designed to change this by making it possible for scientists to undertake long-range studies.

"Our goal has been to stimulate such interest among established researchers," he said.

The decision to include cardiovascular and respiratory research in the program along with cancer, he explained, was based on the fact that certain respiratory and circulatory diseases show much the same statistical relationship to smoking as cancer, and at the same time are more prevalent than cancer.

The Project for Research on Tobacco and Health was initiated by the AMA House of Delegates as an adjunct to its educational campaign to discourage the use of toxic materials--including tobacco--among young people.

The indictment of cigaret smoking as "a serious health hazard, was restated following the Surgeon General's report citing the statistical relationship between smoking and lung cancer and other diseases.

At that time, however, the AMA delegates made it clear they did not think the report could stand alone. It needed facts to back it up.

They indicated that statistical tabulations alone were not enough to dissuade smokers from their habit. The role of smoking as a causative factor in death and disease--the mechanisms by which tobacco smoke attacks the body and the chemical agents, if any, responsible for the damage--also would have to be defined if any educational campaign were to be successful, they said.

Much of the support for the research project was furnished by the tobacco industry itself, which pledged \$10,000,000 over a five-year period. Industry interest was in settling once and for all the question of whether smoking is or is not the cause of certain diseases. Furthermore, the tobacco firms wanted to know if smoking

was implicated in disease, was it due to some specific agent or agents in the tobacco which could be removed from the smoke.

As Dr. Seevers explained: "While the medical profession and tobacco industry have somewhat divergent reasons for promoting tobacco research, both are committed to basic scientific research as the best means of developing specific answers to the questions raised by our smoking population."

"Certainly there are no scientific data that would contradict the basic tenets of the Surgeon General's report," he added.

"I believe very few, if any, of the scientists working under this program would advise anyone to smoke. Still we hope that in search for facts, we can retain an open mind."

All grants awarded under the program rest with the AMA-ERF and the research committee headed by Dr. Seevers. Other members of the committee are Drs. Richard J. Bing, professor and chairman of the department of medicine, Wayne State University; Robert J. Hasterlik, professor of medicine at the University of Chicago School of Medicine; John B. Hickam, professor and chairman of the department of internal medicine, Indiana University Medical Center; Paul S. Larson, professor and chairman of the department of pharmacology, Medical College of Virginia, and Paul Kotin, director of the National Environmental Health Science Center, Chapel Hill, N.C.

To date 79 grants have been awarded, including four in foreign countries, and a total of \$6,090,886 committed to research projects.

Goals and guidelines laid down for the awarding of grants are centered on "efforts to encourage and support studies to determine which significant ailments might be caused or aggravated by smoking...those mechanisms by which cigaret smoking might affect health...and the particular substance or substances in smoke which might be the causal or aggravating agent."

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