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The Smoking Disease

SIR,—The possibility that a cigarette might be produced which gave similar satisfaction to that of the tobacco-filled article but lacked its noxious effects may be as remote as the possibility that one might achieve the same in respect of whisky, or even coffee. The elements which provide the pleasure and the pain are probably inextricably associated even if not identical.

One wonders why it is acceptable to prohibit driving a motor vehicle at more than 70 miles an hour but not to prohibit cigarette smoking. On the most conservative interpretation of the available evidence of the risks involved in the two activities the one is responsible for several thousand times as many deaths as the other.—I am, etc.,

ALWYN SMITH

Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Manchester

SIR,—Your leading article, "The Smoking Disease" (9 January, p. 61) states "... the diseases for which the evidence shows a causative link with cigarette smoking include ... cancers of the mouth." But what evidence is there? Unlike carcinoma of the bronchus, chronic bronchitis, and ischaemic heart disease, oral cancer has unquestionably shown a steady decline among males for approximately half a century and has shown no increased incidence in women over the same period. The same tendency is apparent in the United States.¹ Quite apart from the difficulty in reconciling this finding with the catastrophic increase in cigarette smoking, carefully conducted epidemiological studies such as that of Wynder, Bross, and Feldman² have failed to show any significant relationship between oral cancer and cigarette smoking but that there was a relation between this disease and pipe or cigar smoking. The same

conclusion is reached by Clemmesen³ in his painstaking review of the evidence.

The case against cigarette smoking as a hazard to life and health is overwhelming. It is a pity to provide ammunition for those who distrust the statistics by attempting to blame cigarette smoking for more diseases than the evidence justifies.—I am, etc.,

R. A. CAWSON

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¹ McComb, W. S., and Fletcher, G. H., *Cancer of the Head and Neck*, Baltimore, Williams and Wilkins, 1967.

² Wynder, E. L., Bross, I. J., and Feldman, R. M., *Cancer (Philadelphia)* 1957, 10, 1300.

³ Clemmesen, J., *Acta Pathologica et Microbiologica Scandinavica*, 1965, Supplement No. 174.

SIR,—May I draw attention to another harmful effect associated with cigarette smoking. A total of 775 cases of newly delivered mothers were studied to see whether cigarette smoking, particularly heavy smoking, affected the incidence of breast-feeding. Each patient was asked if she intended to breast-feed, whether or not she smoked cigarettes, and, if so, how many per day. The results are analysed in the

Cigarettes Smoked per Day	Breast-feeders	Not Breast-feeders	Total
None	176 (42%)	245	421
Up to 20 ..	71 (25%)	216	287
21 or more ..	13 (19%)	54	67
Total	260 (35%)	515	775

Table. As can be seen, the incidence of breast-feeding among all the cases studied was 35%; this was reduced to 24% in smokers, and in those who smoked over 20 a day the incidence was almost halved to 19%.

The significance of these results is probably two-fold: women who smoke, particu-

larly the heavy smokers, are less likely to be the type of person who wishes to breast-feed their baby; in addition the act of smoking itself is likely to interfere with breast-feeding.

A campaign to discourage cigarette smoking could thus increase the incidence of breast-feeding, with a possible decrease in the maternal morbidity and mortality in patients whose lactation is suppressed, and also possibly give rise to a decrease in the perinatal mortality rate.—I am, etc.,

J. B. JONES

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SIR,—The new report from the Royal College of Physicians¹ brings the problem of smoking and the importance of prevention once more into the limelight. This brings to mind a survey I carried out a few years ago while in medical school, when I visited five schools and interviewed one hundred 15-year-olds about their smoking habits and views on smoking.

The most interesting point to come out of the survey was the effect one headmaster had on his pupils. This particular school was a secondary modern school, and all the pupils interviewed were going to leave at the age of 15. The headmaster gave a lesson on "economics," on which they worked out how much smoking cost each of them per year. He then encouraged the class to name things that they would like to buy with this money, and to encourage the pupils to save he then introduced a savings scheme into the school.

The result of all this was that this school had the lowest number of smokers of any visited and the pupils saved money to buy the object that they had set their sights on. One pupil has been known to withdraw £40 from his account and still have some left in.