

# Time to review cancer research

*A NATIONAL COUNCIL  
NEEDED TO CONTROL  
THE PURSE STRINGS*

**I**N Britain at present there is no laboratory adequately equipped for studying the cancer-inducing effects of inhaled materials on the lungs. Nor is there likely to be in the foreseeable future.

Yet lung cancer is a major cause of premature death and in recent years it has actually reduced the average age at which men die.

An inhalation research laboratory would cost between £20,000 and £30,000, not an out-of-the-way figure. But whose job is it to provide it? The Government-sponsored funds and the charitable organisations which support the work that goes on in laboratories, refuse in the normal way to provide money for building new laboratories. This is primarily up to universities, which are no longer the ideal places for most types of cancer-research work. Cancer research in 1967 usually means a full-time job, not a sideline for university teachers or for busy hospital consultants.

**Scarce funds**  
One new laboratory, to investigate ways of treating cancer by immunological methods, has just been built by the Institute of Cancer Research, using endowment funds. But such funds are

British scientists and the voluntary funds supporting them have made possible great advances in cancer research. But could our current research effort be more effectively organised and deployed? DAVID SPARK has been talking to Dr. F. J. C. Roe, Reader in Experimental Pathology at the Institute of Cancer Research, who believes that it could.

play in the total international effort; work out the jobs we ought to be doing and make some arrangements to get them done if suitable space and facilities are not already available. Cancer is not a disease with a solution just around the corner, waiting to be covered in London or New-castle or Bradford or Paris. Nor is it a giant jigsaw puzzle with just one or two key pieces missing. It is a whole series of diseases requiring a whole series of solutions. It requires a campaign of often highly complex research which is likely to continue for as long as anyone can foresee.

## Main sources

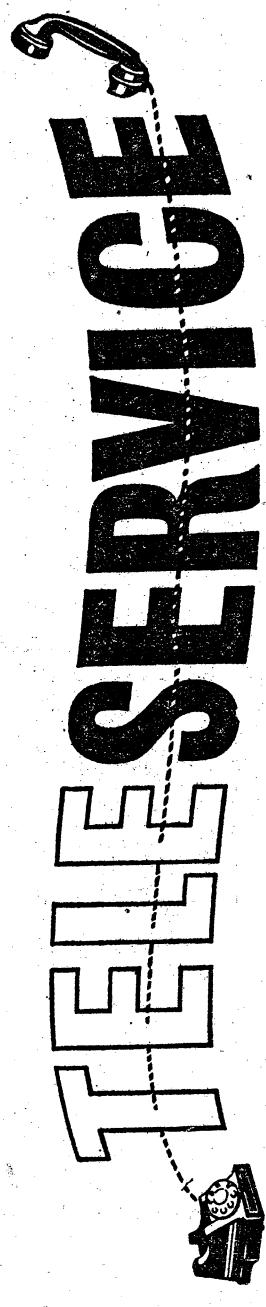
As things stand, British cancer research has three main sources of money: The Government's Medical Research Council, and two voluntary funds — the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the British Empire Cancer Campaign for Research. The Imperial, which is associated with the Royal College of Surgeons, runs its own research laboratories in Lincoln's Inn Field and Mill Hill, developing all three of these and also for developing further institutes: one in Yorkshire and one further north.



Mr. R. R. Robson, chairman of the South Shields branch of the British Empire Cancer Campaign for Research, with some of the children of Would-be Street, South Shields, from whom he received a donation of £12 10s.

nave Street, South Shields, from whom he received a donation of £12 10s. They are: Christine Jorgenson, Ann Simpson, Christopher Routledge, Patrick Routledge, Dawn Craigie, Derrick Hardingham and Margaret Simpson.

of cancer research can fail to cover the ground. It is one's job to consider cancer research as a whole, identify the role which Britain should



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QUICK REPLACEMENTS

London Line BLACK was formed in the 1920's to help cancer researchers in other places. It and the Medical Research Council consider applications from research institutes for money to finance specific projects.

This arrangement, and the link with university work which is the other feature of present cancer-research organisation, were nicely geared to the situation when there were a great many obvious projects to tackle, with researchers all over the country able and eager to tackle them and only needing the money.

Now the situation has changed. Most of the obvious jobs have been done. Research has become more complex and frequently requires expensive equipment, the cost of which is only justifiable if it is fully used before it becomes obsolete.

The links between cancer research laboratories and universities now tend to block progress. Older disciplines tend to perpetuate themselves and establish lines of research and expand to leave no room for new approaches. For this reason, Britain's contribution to tumour virus research has until recently lagged far behind that of the United States.

One present need is that we should decide in general terms

how much of our effort we

should devote to research into

the prevention and causes of

cancer and how much into its

diagnosis and treatment. It is

not easy to establish the best

balance when you are merely

considering the merits of

other university and medical

financial support.

Both the Imperial Fund and

the BECCR may be criticised

for drawing their advisers

from too narrow a field. They

include, for instance, no

epidemiologist, that is, a man

expert in subjects like lung

cancer and cancer in industry.

**Busy men**

The BECCR relies heavily

on panels of busy men. Per

haps it should spend more on

making sure that its annual

budget now over £1.5m. is

used to the fullest possible ad-

vantage.

The ideal thing would be for

the Medical Research Council,

the Imperial Fund and the

BECCR to get together to form

a national Cancer Research

Council which would not only

consider applications

from other charities and with

other calls on Government

funds. It is important there-

fore that we should spend our

money in the most profit-

able way possible,

that means some

national co-ordination such as

a national cancer research

council could provide.