

Draft Letter

Sir,

In his report for 1969 on the state of the public health, the Chief Medical Officer referred to the number of deaths which he attributed to smoking and claimed that "on reasonable assumptions about the main groups of such deaths from lung cancer, chronic bronchitis and ischaemic heart disease, some 80,000 premature probably occur in England and Wales each year". In the report on Smoking and Health just issued by the Department of Health and Social Security, it is estimated, on the basis of certain detailed assumptions which almost certainly result in an over-estimate, that this figure is, not 80,000, but 63,500.

In their report, Smoking and Health Now, published early in 1971, a Committee of the Royal College of Physicians devoted Appendix A to the economic consequences of a reduction in cigarette smoking, and claimed that "there is little doubt that in this country there would be a large credit balance" if cigarette smoking were eliminated. The new report on Smoking and Health shows also that, when the full effects are realised, reductions of 20% and 40% in cigarette smoking would have the economic consequence of substantially increasing the costs of the health and social security services.

Since the accuracy of the statements by the Chief Medical Officer and the Committee of the Royal College of Physicians, made with the full weight of these authorities, could not be checked at the time they were published, however much one might suspect their accuracy, it is only right to record their inaccuracy, when the evidence does become available, in order to prevent future repetitions of inaccurate but apparently authoritative statements. I imagine that the authorities concerned will concur in this.

301097375