La. men have high cancer rate

By DALE CURRY
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NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana men have higher death rates from cancer than the national average, according to a cancer report released Tuesday.

But white women, tallying lower than the national average in cancer in general, have dramatically increased in incidence of lung cancer in Louisiana. The state-funded study shows that in 1980 lung cancer was the leading cause of cancer death in white women in Louisiana, surpassing the traditional leader, breast cancer.

"Cancer in Louisiana" was released by the Tumor Registry of the state Office of Health Services and Environmental Quality. It is primarily a graphic exposure of death incidence rates from 1930 to 1980.

Some major conclusions are:
- Louisiana men have higher than national death rates for cancer of all kinds. Black women have comparable rates while white women experience lower rates.
- High cancer mortality is concentrated in south Louisiana for white men, black men and black women.
- Louisiana lung cancer death rates have increased steadily since 1960 with all sex-race groups having higher than national rates.

In 1980, lung cancer surpassed breast cancer as the leading cause of cancer deaths in white women.

The report estimated that 7,600 persons will die of cancer in Louisiana in 1983 and that 14,800 persons will be diagnosed as having cancer. Approximately 30 percent of all Louisianians will develop cancer within their lifetimes, it said.

The LSU Medical Center Department of Pathology collaborated in the study with the state Department of Health and Human Resources. The report was announced at DHHR offices here by Dr. Sarah M. Braud, state health officer, and Dr. Pelayo Correa of LSU.

Correa said the report does not address causes of cancer but it is unlikely that disproportionate incidence of cancer in Louisiana, especially south Louisiana, is because of chance.

He said he personally believes that people in south Louisiana smoke and drink alcohol more than average and that poverty, diet and petrochemical pollution also are likely factors.

The fact that blacks in south Louisiana suffer more cancer supports the theory that poverty is a factor, he said, pointing out that the west bank of the Mississippi River has more poverty than the east bank.

He said lack of educational programs for children in schools is a serious mistake. "No one is informing our kids that (smoking) is a bigger danger than cocaine, marijuana and everything else put together," he said, blaming smoking for 90 percent of lung cancer.

According to the report, the economic impact of cancer in the state was a loss of $410 million in earnings in 1977. The total medical care expenditures for cancer in Louisiana in 1980 were estimated at $176 million.

Noting that cancer represents more than 100 different kinds and diseases, Correa said the steady increase over a long period of time can be defined as an epidemic of chronic disease.

Some other findings were that Louisiana has had excessive lung cancer mortality rates since 1930 with a steady increase, that New Orleans black men are at higher risk for lung cancer than white men, that oral cavity cancer rates are twice as high in Louisiana than the nation and that Louisiana blacks are at higher risk of stomach cancer than blacks elsewhere.

The study also found Louisiana males have excessive rates for laryngeal cancer. New Orleans women have a remarkable peak for cervical cancer in the 30-40 age group not seen elsewhere in the nation. Louisiana white females have markedly lower rates for uterine cancer (excluding cervical cancer), Louisiana black women are at higher risk of cervical cancer than white women, black males are at higher risk of prostatic cancer than their white counterparts, and Louisiana blacks have more upper digestive tract cancer than whites.

Cancers that were shown higher in Louisiana whites than in blacks were lymphoma, leukemia, malignant melanoma, cancer of the kidney and bladder and brain tumor.

Copies of the report are available for reference at each parish's main library at regional health offices in Baton Rouge, Metairie, Thibodaux, Lafayette, Shreveport, Alexandria, Monroe and Lake Charles.