S. Louisiana suffers high cancer rate

Cancer will strike 14,800 Louisianians in 1983 and will kill 7,600, says an American Cancer Society report.

The figures are estimates, though, and may not accurately indicate the cancer rate in Louisiana, said John L. McCarthy, executive vice president of the Louisiana Division of the ACS.

"In the absence of an operational, statewide tumor registry, we can't really say. But from our information, the figures appear to be low," McCarthy said.

In this year's edition of Cancer Facts and Figures, the society estimated there would be 855,000 new cancer cases in the United States and 440,000 Americans would die of cancer in 1983 - a death rate of 187 per 100,000 population. Earlier diagnosis and treatment might have saved the lives of about 145,000 of them, the society said.

Louisiana's projected 7,600 cancer deaths mean a death rate of 167 per 100,000 population - 20 fewer deaths than the national average.

McCarthy said 10 south Louisiana parishes were included recently in a list of the country's top 18 counties with high cancer rates.

The concentrated incidence in Louisiana supports his belief that the report's figures are low. But conclusive evidence could come only from the operation of a statewide lung cancer and tumor registry to accurately track cancer cases and mortality rates throughout Louisiana, he said.

The ACS report lists lung cancer as the most deadly form of the disease once again - projected to kill 2,200 people in Louisiana this year and 117,000 people in the United States. The "relentless rise in lung cancer deaths" in the country represents a jump of 6,000 new cancer deaths in a single year.

Stating that more than 75 percent of the anticipated deaths from lung cancer are related to cigarette smoking, the report says "lung cancer is very difficult to detect early. Only 9 percent of all lung cancer patients live five years or more after diagnosis."

Today's overall prospect is that three cancer patients in every eight will survive five years or more. A decade ago the prospects of survival were one patient in every three.

Five years without symptoms following treatment is considered a cure for a cancer patient.

The ACS report lists more than a dozen recent improvements in techniques which have contributed to the better cure rates for various forms of the disease.

The report says that two of the 37 forms of cancer that it keeps up with are expected to result in fewer deaths in 1983 - non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and invasive cancer of the cervix. For 21 other cancers, the 1983 estimates remain unchanged.

The remaining 14 cancer forms are predicted to have increased deaths this year.

Cancer of the prostate is expected to account for 24,100 deaths in 1983 - up 800 from 23,300 in 1982.

Increases for other cancers range from small to negligible. Breast cancer, the leading cause of cancer mortality among women, is expected to result in 200 additional deaths this year.

Minor increases in numbers of deaths also are expected from cancers of the esophagus, stomach, liver, pancreas, skin, ovary, bladder, kidney, brain and nervous system, and leukemia.

Stomach cancer deaths have been declining steadily for the past quarter of a century.

Cancer Facts and Figures is published and distributed annually by the American Cancer Society to present a comprehensive and current picture of cancer in the United States.

The report concludes with a review of the seven warning signals of cancer.