

# Cigarette-cancer link challenged

BY SHALAN McILKATH, Medical Correspondent.

A Canadian statistician who challenges the evidence linking lung cancer with cigarette smoking entered the lion's den of Australia's anti-cancer fighters yesterday.

Professor Theodore D. Sterling of Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, told a NSW State Cancer Council symposium that recent studies had linked lung cancer with air pollution and the victim's occupation.

Professor Sterling, who was nominated as a speaker at the meeting by the Australian tobacco industry, denied that he represented the industry.

He said later that the industry had offered to meet the expenses of his trip to Australia because of papers he had published criticising the statistical case for linking cigarette smoking.

His disclaimer did not prevent the president of the Australian Council on Smoking and Health, Dr. Conter Harvey, congratulating him as a "doing his duty" as a tobacco company representative.

Dr. Harvey said the tobacco companies' tactic was to create the impression that scientists disagreed about cigarette smoking and thereby weaken peoples' incentive to stop smoking.

Dr. Bernard Stewart, of the University of NSW's pathology department, repudiated Professor Sterling's argument as a minority view which went against the opinion of learned bodies, such as the World Health Organisation and the Royal College of Physicians.

Dr. Maurice Joseph, a thoracic physician and consultant at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, and Dr. Julian Lee, a thoracic physician at the same hospital, called on their clinical experience to reject Professor Sterling's hypothesis.

Professor Sterling argued that statistical studies linking lung cancer with cigarette smoking were faulty because they were not representative of the general population and did not take people's occupations into account.

Higher lung cancer rates among cigarette smokers might be related to other unmeasured factors, such as an individual's exposure to toxic fumes and dusts.

A 1970 survey by the US National Centre for Health Statistics had shown that the highest prevalence of cigarette smoking was among blue-collar workers who were industrially exposed to such air pollutants.

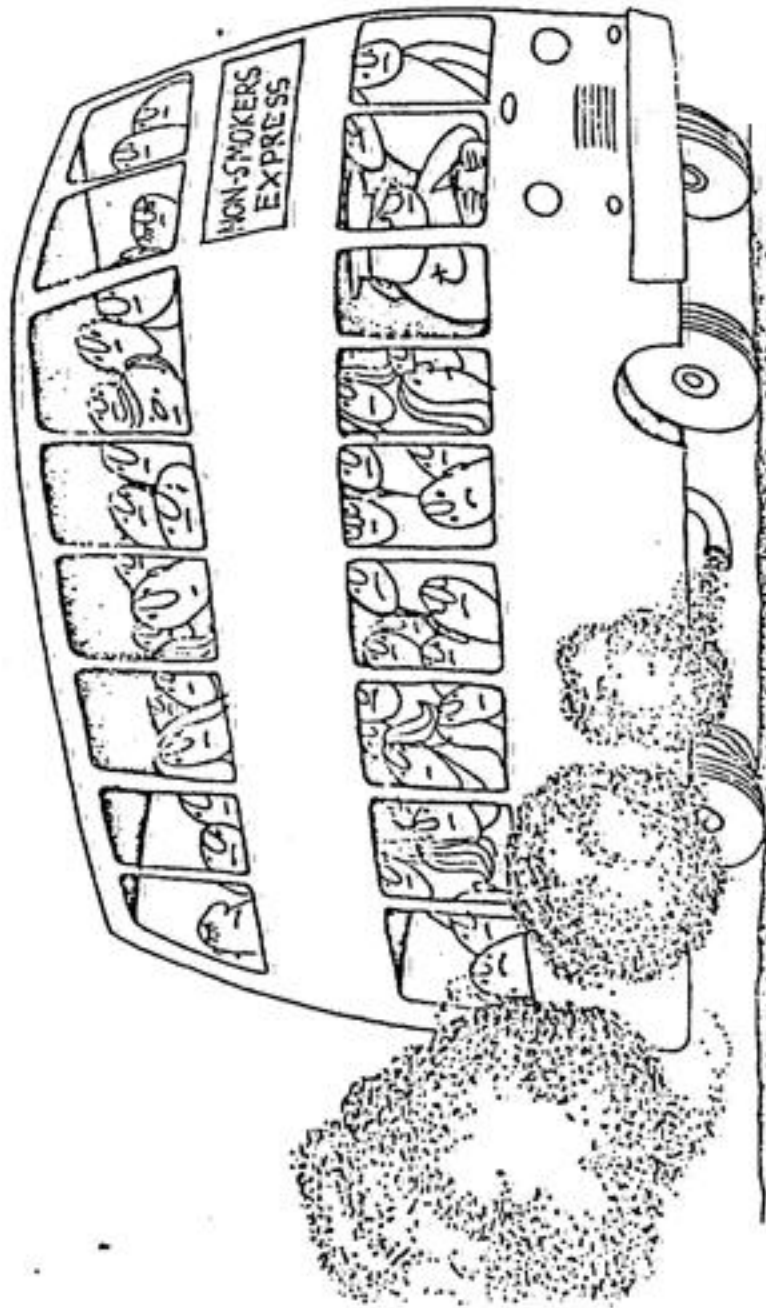
Professor Sterling said the cigarette smoking theory could not explain the unexpected decline in lung cancer in males in Britain and the US in the 1950s and 1960s, when cigarette consumption was increasing.

He suggested the change was related to

men shifting from industrial to service jobs after World War II.

Dr. Stewart said Professor Sterling's case collapsed because the statistical methods on which he relied to prove an association between air pollutants and lung cancer were the same as those he rejected in absolving cigarette smoking.

Dimethylnitrosamine, probably the most potent of all cancer-producing agents, was present in cigarette smoke, which also contained a much higher concentration than the air of another cancer agent benzopyrene.



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