

## Smoking Declines, Yet Cancers Multiply

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To the Editor:

Your Sept. 21 news article on the fatal effects of smoking quotes the British statistician Richard Peto as saying that contrary to popular misconception, cancers from causes other than smoking are not rising. The misconception is Dr. Peto's.

While smoking is the major single cause of avoidable cancer deaths, mortality rates for lung cancer in the United States and Britain are declining, reflecting reductions in smoking. Moreover, 20 percent of all lung cancers are due to causes other than smoking, particularly exposure to occupational carcinogens and air pollution. Nonsmoking lung cancers are among the third or fourth commonest cause of United States cancer deaths.

Incidence and mortality rates for other cancers like breast, prostate, kidney, brain, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and multiple myeloma in people older than 55 have increased sharply over recent decades in all major industrialized countries. It is misleading to exaggerate the relation between smoking and cancer to trivialize the role of exposure to industrial carcinogens — in air, water, food, consumer items and the workplace — in causing the cancer epidemic. SAMUEL S. EPSTEIN, M.D.

Prof., Occupational-Environmental  
Medicine, University of Illinois  
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