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Primary Cancer of the Lung in Nuns

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Cover Page Footnote

As rules of religious communities for women prohibit the use of cigarettes, this pilot project was undertaken to estimate the frequency and type of primary carcinoma of the lung in women with little or no smoking experience. Thirty-three cases of primary carcinoma of the lung were collected by reviewing admissions to 500 Catholic general hospitals from an estimated population of 100,000 nuns over a ten year period.

PRIMARY CANCER OF THE LUNG IN NUNS

Collection of Thirty-three Cases

JAMES T. NIX, M.D.

As rules of religious communities for women prohibit the use of cigarettes, this pilot project was undertaken to estimate the frequency and type of primary carcinoma of the lung in women with little or no smoking experience. Thirty-three cases of primary carcinoma of the lung were collected by reviewing admissions to 500 Catholic general hospitals from an estimated population of 100,000 nuns over a ten year period.

Pathological specimen was obtained by autopsies — 7 cases, bronchoscopic biopsy — 1 case, cytologic study — 8 cases, and surgical exploration — 17 cases. The cell types were:

adenocarcinoma	14 cases
alveolar cell carcinoma	5 cases
squamous cell carcinoma	4 cases
undifferentiated cell carcinoma	3 cases
carcinoma type not specified	7 cases

Recognition age was over 60 years in 25 of the 33 cases. The location of the lesion was in the right lung in 18 cases, and in the left lung in 15 cases. Thirty-two of the 33 cases were caucasians. Eight of the 33 patients represented in this survey are living.

Primary carcinoma of the lung is less frequent in nuns than in the general population. Adenocarcinoma rather than squamous cell carcinoma is the most common type. These 33 sisters had no smoking experience, prior to entering the convent; they joined religious communities 50 years ago, prior to social acceptance of smoking among women.

The exhibit pictured below was part of the American Medical Association convention displays in Chicago, Illinois, this past June. It was prepared by Dr. Nix who is chairman of the Health of Religious Committee of the National Federation assisting The Catholic Hospital Association and Superiors of religious communities in this field. The display was used again at the Louisiana Academy of General Practice, 16th Annual Assembly in Shreveport last month. It was staffed by the Caddo-Shreveport Catholic Physicians' Guild.

