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Cause of Death of Nuns in the United States During the Calendar Year 1963

(A Preliminary Report)

JAMES T. NIX, M.D.*

The Committee on Health Care of Clergy and Religious of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds working with The Catholic Hospital Association is studying the causes of death of nuns in the United States during the calendar year 1963. Two hundred sixty-one communities with a total membership of 15,684 are cooperating in this survey. During the first four months of this year preliminary data has been obtained on 366 reported nun deaths. The average age of these nuns at the time of death was 75 years. Sixty percent of these nuns were teachers, 18% were in nursing and allied medical assignments, 10% were domestics, and 8% had miscellaneous assignments. Primary causes of death included:

Cardiac	23%
Cancer	23%
Pneumonia	14%
Cerebro vascular accident	7%
Pulmonary embolism	3%
Trauma	3%
Tuberculosis	1%
Postoperative	1%

Three-fourths of the deaths attributed to trauma were due to hip fracture.

Twenty-six percent of the cases collected were autopsied. Organ distribution of the cancer deaths included:

Colon and rectum	13 cases
Breast	6 cases
Stomach	5 cases
Ovary	3 cases
Lung	3 cases
Uterine fundus	1 case

The uterine fundus cancer was an incidental finding at autopsy.

*Dr. Nix is chairman of the Federation Health Care Committee engaged in this program.