ENCOURAGEMENT FROM RECENT STATISTICS

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INTRODUCTION

In England and Wales most of the central national records, which together form the health information system, are managed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS). Two other important systems of records (The Mental Health Enquiry and Sick Absence Records) are managed by the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS).

The Medical Division of OPCS is an integral part of the Office and much of its work depends on the system of records, which OPCS manages as part of its general responsibilities (e.g. the registration of vital events). The Division is concerned with the organisation and analysis of data useful for studying the health (and health problems) of the community, for research and for administration. Our work takes two main forms: first, production and interpretation of the statistics themselves; and, second, studies of particular topics by use of records that have been suitably organised and indexed.

CURRENT STATISTICAL SYSTEMS

The earliest statistical sources were the census and registrations of births, deaths and marriages. Over the years records from medical services have been added: the Cancer Registry and the Hospital In-patient Enquiry, Notification of Infective Diseases and, more recently, of Congenital Malformations. The merger of the GRO with the
Government Social Survey in 1970 added the information collected in the General Household Survey and many specific surveys. Furthermore, in 1970 we also began a study of consultations in general practice. Finally, a system of records, which has significance for cancer records and for cohort studies, is the National Health Service Central Register (NHSCR) which is basically a clearing house for registration of the patients of general practitioners in the National Health Service.

Many of these sources are derived from records created primarily for various services or for administrative or legal purposes, not for statistics. These general information systems based on services (including registrations of births and deaths) are the backbone of the national health information system; they are valuable in their own right but the potential of these records can only be achieved by exploiting them fully - (a) as general descriptive statistics in themselves; (b) as general longitudinal statistics by linking records of persons within and among record systems; (c) by using the records in retrospective and prospective studies for problem-orientated research; and, (d) by ad hoc research co-ordinated with the basic routine statistics.

CANCER RECORDS

Information on cancer is available from most of the sets of records listed above, and its potential use is greatly improved if the records of individual persons are linked. The oldest and most reliable records are from certification of causes of death. Records of the Hospital In-patient Enquiry, of General Practice, and from the General Household Survey all include information on cancer.

CANCER REGISTRATION

This service began as a separate nationwide enterprise in 1939 and its facilities would be made available for diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The register was transferred to the General Register Office in 1948.