

# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, NATIONAL CANCER ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA\*

LEWIS S. ROBERTSON

After referring to the recent death of Dr. C. P. Theron and Mr. Kurt Colsen, who had been actively connected with the National Cancer Association for a number of years, Dr. Robertson said:

Turning now to the Annual Report for the year 1957, we are greatly encouraged to note the progress of the Association.

*Finance.* The final accounts reveal that the National Cancer Fund subsidized the Association to the extent of £61,560 during the year under review, whereas total receipts of the Fund amounted to £23,786. During the same period the National Cancer Association received an income of approximately £12,000. Viewing the position as a whole, it would be observed that payments exceeded income for the year to the extent of approximately £26,000. Notwithstanding the excess of expenditure over income, the financial situation fortunately remains satisfactory, thanks to the substantial amount previously collected by the National Cancer Appeal Committee. It must be borne in mind that the Association made no special effort during the past year to raise funds. I have no doubt that the public will respond generously when a further appeal for funds has to be launched.

*Research.* The Annual Report reveals that great progress has been made in its various fields of activity. It is necessary, however, to caution against over optimism in regard to cancer research. Research into cancer is time-consuming and expensive, and no one can guarantee that research will provide the answer to this problem in the foreseeable future. More money is being spent on cancer research in the world today than ever before, and South Africa's contribution, although small, is by no means insignificant.

*Cancer Bulletin.* Until the cause of cancer or a cure for cancer has been discovered in research laboratories, it is of prime importance for the Association to leave no stone unturned in its efforts to save the lives of those who can be saved by means of early diagnosis and treatment. The Association strives to achieve this object in various ways. In the first place every endeavour is being made to bring to the notice of the medical profession the latest information available on the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. The *South African Cancer Bulletin*, which focuses the attention of the medical profession on problems of diagnosis and treatment, commenced publication during 1957, and the first four quarterly issues have been well received by the medical profession in South Africa and elicited high praise from cancer associations overseas.

*Films.* Valuable additions have been made to the Association's professional film library, and films are becoming more and more in demand by both the medical and nursing professions. There has also been an active interest in these films by medical auxiliaries.

*Early Diagnosis and Treatment.* However great the efforts of the medical profession may be, these will be of little avail unless individual sufferers from cancer seek early diagnosis and treatment. The Association therefore regards its Public Education programme as of prime importance, and it is in this field of activity that probably the most gratifying progress has been made. Many thousands of pamphlets for the lay public have been distributed and a message of hope has been brought to thousands more by means of personal contact through the Association's exhibit and mobile unit. It has been particularly gratifying to observe how the women of South Africa have cooperated, especially in regard to breast cancer. A matter of the gravest concern to the Association, however, is the apathetic attitude of the male population. For some reason or other, men seem to regard cancer as a women's disease. A warning is issued that such a supposition is entirely erroneous. The misconception is probably due to the frequency of cancer of the breast and cancer of the reproductive organs in women in comparison with the more scattered occurrences of cancer in men. As many males die of cancer as females, and most of the cancers that affect men are more difficult to detect. Common types are cancer of the digestive and respiratory systems. Males also frequently develop cancer of the skin and lip, which are easy to treat, as well as of the prostate gland and the mouth. During 1958 the existing programme of public education will be expanded and additional ways and means of public education will be investigated.

*Care of the Cancer Patient.* The Cape Western Branch of the Cancer Association has been authorized to conduct a pilot experiment to determine how best the Association can assist the cancer patient. There appears to be every indication that this experiment will be crowned with success and result eventually in rendering worth-while humanitarian services to cancer patients and their dependants.

*Cancer of the Skin.* Attention is directed to some aspects of cancer which are of public concern. We are apt to forget that cancer of the skin is still the most frequent form of the disease in the world today, because fear has so concentrated our attention on those forms which more often lead to death. We hear little about the triumph of medicine in the cure of skin cancer.

\* Delivered at the Annual General Meeting, Johannesburg, 4 June 1958.

*Lung Cancer.* Most popular, or perhaps most unpopular, has been the work on smoking and lung cancer. The practical application we look for here is of course the opportunity for prevention. In the last 50 years the insults to which our respiratory systems have been exposed have been increasing, and in consequence the death rate from cancer of the lung has been rising. The recognition that cigarette smoking is an important, probably the most important of the insults responsible, provides an opportunity for those who wish to do so to reduce their lung-cancer risk. This is now clear and should be stated clearly. This does not, however, mean that we should allow our civic authorities to think that we shall relax our efforts to make them do their duty and clean our city air. No one needs to smoke, but we all have to breathe the air around us.

*Radiation.* A great deal of investigation is proceeding in several countries overseas in regard to radiation therapy, and new im-

proved radiation therapy machines are constantly being constructed. Great strides have been made in radiation therapy, and the justifiable demand for the provision of facilities for adequate radiation therapy must be met by the hospital authorities. Radiation can produce cancer, as well as cure cancer, and in an age in which we are moving over to an economy based on nuclear power, the fear that we may thereby be adding to the cancer burden is ever present in the minds of those responsible for the vast new enterprises.

*Conclusion.* Let us hope that the research efforts that are being undertaken in many parts of the world will soon throw light on all the dark secrets of cancer, so that the fear and dread which it has inspired in the past may be banished from our lives, as medical science has already banished the fear and dread of so many other diseases.