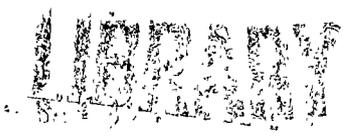




EUROPE AGAINST CANCER



October 8th, 1987

EUROPEANS AND THE PREVENTION OF CANCER - PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

Nearly four Europeans out of ten underestimate or are ill-informed about the possibilities of cancer prevention. This is one of the principle conclusions of a survey carried out in March and April 1987 in the twelve member countries of the European Community, within the framework of the "Europe Against Cancer" programme (1987-1989).

The purpose of the survey was to find out:-

- a) The degree of awareness among Europeans of the principle individual rules of cancer prevention.
- b) The application of these rules by Europeans.
- c) The attitudes of Europeans towards a series of national and Community measures in the fight against smoking.

The large majority of Europeans cite tobacco as the most frequent cause of cancer, but 28% still do not know that tobacco is by far the most widespread carcinogenic agent in our environment. Furthermore, among the causes of cancer, Europeans overestimate the importance of radioactivity, of pollution, of occupational health hazards, while they accord too little importance to nutritional factors.

According to the results of the survey, Europeans are reasonably well aware of the "European Code Against Cancer" adopted by cancer specialists, with the exception of the nutritional 'commandments'. The commandment "Do not smoke" is the best known, but at the same time is judged to be the most difficult to apply.

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A comparison between countries gives the following results:-

- There is particularly low awareness of the damaging effects of passive smoking in Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany.
- The lowest awareness of the commandment on moderation in consumption of alcoholic drinks exists in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany.
- Awareness of the nutritional commandments is poor in all countries with the exception of Denmark.
- The risks of prolonged exposure to sun are little known in Spain, Portugal, Germany and Belgium.
- Awareness of the commandment relating to moles is low in Portugal, Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Among women, there is a considerable gap between awareness of the commandments which may affect them and their actual practice. Three out of four European women know the importance of cervical smears, but 57% do not have access to screening, even though this would prevent three quarters of deaths through cancer of the cervix. 58% of European women indicate that they are aware of the importance of mammography but only 13% undergo the test, even though this method of screening would prevent one third of the deaths caused by cancer of the breast.

The other aspect of the survey is devoted to the extent of tobacco addiction in the twelve European countries and European reactions to national and Community measures to combat smoking.

Among the two hundred and fifty four million Europeans aged 15 and over, it may be estimated that there are 94 million smokers. A further 48 million Europeans have succeeded in giving up.

This survey shows that male smokers and young smokers between 15 and 24 years of age are equally aware of the price of cigarettes, which has a deterrent effect. By contrast, among women, addiction to tobacco, perhaps as a sign of female liberation, takes precedence over economic constraints so that high prices do not act as a deterrent.

European smokers do not in general pay particular attention to the tar content in a cigarette since only 36% say that they are concerned about this.

On the other hand, more than half the smokers (53%) say they wish to reduce or give up their tobacco intake.

This survey shows massive public support for proposals on national and Community measures to combat tobacco addiction.

Seven out of ten Europeans would welcome a marked increase in tobacco taxes, part of which would be devoted to fighting cancer. This opinion is largely shared by all the European countries. In this context, the European Commission put forward in July 1987 to the Council and to the European Parliament, a proposal for the upward alignment of excise duties on tobacco, as part of the abolition between now and 1992 of tax boundaries within the Community.

More than seven out of ten Europeans are in favour of banning the advertising of tobacco; nearly eight out of ten Europeans support banning smoking in public places. The most popular measure was banning the sale of tobacco to young people with 84% of Europeans supporting this proposal.

On the other hand, the proposal to ban before 1992 duty free sales of tobacco in the European Community was the least popular measure, with only 54% in favour. Opposition was strongest in Denmark with 64% against. It should be borne in mind that Denmark has the highest taxes on tobacco of all the member countries of the Community.

The information contained in this study of European attitudes towards cancer prevention will serve to clarify and guide the actions of the principal parties in charge of the programme "Europe Against Cancer"- the organisations concerned with the fight against cancer, health ministers and the European Commission. Other surveys will be carried out in 1988 and 1989 to evaluate the success of actions taken within the framework of the programme.

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