Schweiz. Z. Path. Bakt. 1955;18:731

The Increase of the Death Rate from Cancer of the Breast in the Netherlands

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Death rate from cancer of the breast is increasing in the Netherlands.

In the last 30 years it has been doubled in all age groups.

About 1925, the League of Nations studied cancer of the breast in Great Britain, Italy and the Netherlands. In Great Britain it was found twice as frequently as in Holland. To-day, however, death from cancer of the breast in all age groups is as frequent in the Netherlands as in Great Britain.

Which factors have changed in the Netherlands that could explain this increase?

In the period between 1880 and 1940 birth rate in the Netherlands decreased steadily (from 300 yearly, per 1000 married women, aged 15-50, to 150), so that in 1940 it was only half as great as in 1880.

This has been regarded as the cause of the increasing death rate from cancer of the breast.

If this were right, one should expect that the increase of the death rate would have occurred only in married women.

I have studied this. The result was, however, that death rate from cancer of the breast had increased both in married and unmarried women.

In married women it had increased by slightly more than 100%, in women never married the increase was 70%.

Therefore it seems probable that a decreasing birth rate is an etiological factor for the increase of cancer of the breast, but it cannot be the only cause.

Pathologie und Bakteriologie, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1955)

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