

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
VICTORIAN CYTOLOGY (GYNAECOLOGICAL) SERVICE
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 30TH JUNE, 1982

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As will be indicated in this report the increasing work load being experienced by the Service is creating considerable problems. Nevertheless it is gratifying to see this increase as it would suggest that the Service is continuing to meet, and fulfil satisfactorily, the needs of the medical profession and of the women of Victoria.

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT:

In June, 1982, the Board accepted with considerable regret the resignation of Mr. Hans Eisen. Mr. Eisen joined the Board in 1976 as a nominee of the Board of Management of Prince Henry's Hospital. During his six years of membership he made a significant contribution to the activities of the Service. His expertise in the area of computer technology was of particular value at the time that the Service installed its first computer.

DIAGNOSTIC ACTIVITIES:

During the 12 months ended 30th June, 1982, the Service examined 265,397 specimens. This represents an increase of 19,172 or 7.8 per cent. on the volume of specimens received in the previous financial year. In this respect it must be stressed that, whereas in the earlier years of operation of the Service each "specimen" almost invariably consisted of one smear only, more recently it is common to receive two or more smears from each patient. This has resulted from factors such as the increasing incidence of endometrial lesions and the current emphasis on the consequences of D.E.S. exposure in utero. Thus, for example, the procedure recommended for the examination of women suspected of such exposure involves the evaluation of five separate smears. Hence, although just over 265,000 specimens were received in the financial year under review the number of individual smears examined would approximate 290,000.

Since the inception of the Service in January, 1965, 3,027,980 specimens have been processed, these being derived from approximately one million women throughout the State. The year has thus seen the passing of a significant milestone - the reception of the three millionth smear. This event occurred on May 28th, 1982, and was the occasion of a visit to the laboratories of the Service by the Minister of Health, The Honourable T.W. Roper, who personally supervised the registration of the specimen.

"Major abnormalities" were detected in 752 women. As indicated in previous reports the term "major abnormalities" refers to those conditions which are believed to immediately precede invasive cancer namely severe dysplasia and carcinoma in situ, as well as all cases of invasive or established cancer. Major abnormalities, as defined in this way, have been detected in 9,247 women since the inception of the Service.

FINANCIAL ASPECTS:

For the year ending 30th June, 1982, the maintenance or operating cost of the Service was \$1,087,814. As in previous reports, expenditure on additional and replacement equipment, amounting to \$14,328 has been separated from the operating costs. There has thus been an increase of \$168,504 or 18 per cent. in operating costs as compared to those of the previous financial year. The salaries and wages component accounted for \$819,498 or 75 per cent. of the total operating expenditure. This was \$119,216 or 17 per cent. more than that for the previous financial year the increase being largely the result of Wages Board determinations and other obligatory salary increases.

As in previous years the cost per specimen examined can be derived by dividing the operating costs for the full financial year by the total number of specimens examined in this period. Using this method the cost per specimen examined was \$4.10. It could again be stressed that this continues to compare more than favourably with the Commonwealth Schedule Fee of \$13.00 for the examination of a cervical smear in a private laboratory or \$22.00 if, as is more often the case, the combined fee is charged. This additional charge is made for hormonal assessment, an assessment provided by the Service whenever requested by the referring medical practitioner.

The low cost achieved by the V.C.(G.)S. is a reflection of the very marked efficiency with which it operates. This efficiency is due to its internal organization and to the benefits of the "mass production" techniques that are applicable to some aspects of this branch of laboratory medicine. The ways in which costs have been contained is illustrated in the table on the following page. The major problem, of course, is the dramatic increase that has occurred in the average salary per staff member. This has been offset, to some extent, by increased staff efficiency but there are obvious limits to such increases. Similarly by utilising efficient management measures and bulk buying, the "materials" component of the cost has been partially controlled but it is difficult to compensate for the massive inflation that has occurred since 1965.

VICTORIAN CYTOLOGY (GYNAECOLOGICAL) SERVICE - DETAILS OF COSTS 1965 - 1982.

Financial Years	No. of Smears	Expenditure	Average Salary per Staff Member	Salary Cost per Smear	Service and Materials	Total Cost per Smear
1965 - 1966	65,859	\$76,659	\$1,725	\$0.56	\$0.60	\$1.16
1966 - 1967	95,336	\$81,314	\$1,515	\$0.51	\$0.34	\$0.85
1967 - 1968	98,108	\$101,689	\$1,881	\$0.61	\$0.43	\$1.04
1968 - 1969	107,794	\$108,355	\$1,965	\$0.60	\$0.40	\$1.00
1969 - 1970	124,857	\$132,822	\$2,138	\$0.67	\$0.39	\$1.06
1970 - 1971	137,717	\$156,314	\$3,018	\$0.77	\$0.37	\$1.14
1971 - 1972	154,884	\$180,481	\$3,574	\$0.76	\$0.41	\$1.17
1972 - 1973	176,963	\$206,883	\$3,517	\$0.78	\$0.39	\$1.17
1973 - 1974	190,619	\$260,532	\$4,616	\$0.92	\$0.45	\$1.37
1974 - 1975	209,365	\$341,873	\$6,280	\$1.15	\$0.48	\$1.63
1975 - 1976	218,062	\$470,959	\$8,640	\$1.60	\$0.56	\$2.16
1976 - 1977	228,692	\$562,509	\$9,632	\$1.94	\$0.52	\$2.46
1977 - 1978	231,183	\$653,223	\$10,891	\$2.26	\$0.56	\$2.82
1978 - 1979	232,066	\$773,692	\$11,248	\$2.41	\$0.92	\$3.33
1979 - 1980	239,525	\$832,328	\$12,461	\$2.59	\$0.88	\$3.47
1980 - 1981	246,225	\$919,310	\$13,111	\$2.84	\$0.89	\$3.73
1981 - 1982	265,397	\$1,087,814	\$15,278	\$3.12	\$0.98	\$4.10

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STAFF:

Because the Service employs many part-time staff members there is a continual fluctuation in the total number of people employed. However the total complement of staff expressed as full-time equivalents remains unaltered in accordance with the staff ceiling imposed in 1978. Since this time the Service has been restricted to 50.92 full-time equivalent staff members. In addition, allowance is made for the payment of 1 administrative assistant and 1.75 full-time equivalent pathologists seconded from the staff of Prince Henry's Hospital. As indicated in this, and previous reports, there has been a significant increase in the number of smears examined in recent years and this increase has led to very considerable staff stresses. Some relief has been achieved by computerisation of clerical procedures but the actual microscopic evaluation of the specimens cannot be automated. Indeed the only satisfactory way of dealing with an increased volume of work in this "labour intensive" area is by a commensurate increase in staff numbers - an option that has not been available for the past four years. The most serious consequences of these staff stresses are the inevitable delays in issuing diagnostic reports and the impairment of critical activities such as continuing staff education and quality control procedures.

Last year's report referred to the approval granted by the Health Commission to re-classify one of the hospital's Anatomical Pathology registrar posts to that of a specialist pathologist, with the aim of attracting a pathologist experienced in diagnostic cytology. The position thus created was filled by Dr. Leila Cavanagh who joined the staff in July, 1981. Dr. Cavanagh is a graduate of the University of Dublin and received her training in pathology in the United Kingdom. Prior to joining the staff of Prince Henry's she had worked for some years in other Melbourne hospitals. She has had previous experience in cytopathology and is already making a significant contribution to the diagnostic work of the Service.

The staff, both technical and clerical, continues to demonstrate considerable stability. However, it must be stressed that several senior staff members, who have been with the Service for many years, are approaching retirement age. This is particularly alarming in the technical area as, contrary to what obtained in the earlier years of operation, there is no "pool" of trainee cytotechnologists to fill the functional vacancies created by resignations or retirements. This lack is, of course, a direct consequence of the staff ceiling already discussed.

TEACHING, RESEARCH AND OTHER ACTIVITIES:

The combined laboratories of the V.C. (G.)S. and the Prince Henry's Hospital Cytology continue to act as the centre for cytology training in Victoria. The total cytology component of the Royal Melbourne Institute

of Technology's Bachelor of Applied Science course is conducted by these two departments and training is also provided for pathologists and technologists from Victorian, Interstate and Overseas hospitals.

Towards the end of 1981 the Director of the Service, Dr. Michael Drake, became a consultant to the New Zealand Contraception and Health Study. This research project comprises a comprehensive study of a large group of New Zealand women who are using various methods of contraception. An important aspect is the possible association between the various contraceptive methods used and the development of uterine cancer. The latter is monitored largely by cytological methods. Described as "the most comprehensive observational study ever undertaken" of this aspect of female health the project will observe approximately 12,000 women over a period of ten years.

During the latter half of 1981 Dr. Drake was granted Sabbatical leave. Much of this leave was spent on activities relating directly to the work of the V.C.(G.)S. A comprehensive review of terminology relating to precancerous lesions of the uterine cervix was undertaken and a new system of nomenclature developed as a result of this review has been adopted as a working basis by several International groups. Two text-books on Diagnostic Cytology were initiated and a considerable amount of time was spent on a detailed study of the accumulated data of the Service.

In May 1982, Dr. Drake was the guest lecturer at the Annual Scientific Congress of the Japanese Society of Clinical Cytology which was held in Osaka. The lecture, titled "The Possible Role of Wart Virus Infection in the Genesis of Cervical Cancer", was based on the work of the Service.

In September, 1981, the Deputy Director, Dr. Gabriele Medley, took part in a seminar in Canberra on "Cost Effectiveness in Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment". Her presentation, which was based on the activities of the V.C.(G.)S., was published subsequently and created considerable interest.

In January, 1982, Dr. Medley visited North America and in the course of this visit renewed her association with the cytology service operating in the Canadian province of British Columbia. As the V.C.(G.)S. was initially modelled on that in British Columbia this visit yielded a great deal of information of value to our Service. Dr. Medley also spent some time at the general hospital of the University of Mexico where she was able to study the cytological manifestations of certain gynaecological infections that were formerly uncommon in Victoria but which are now being seen with increasing frequency. The most important of these was the infections due to the organism *Chlamydia trachomatis*.

ASSISTANCE FROM OTHER ORGANIZATIONS:

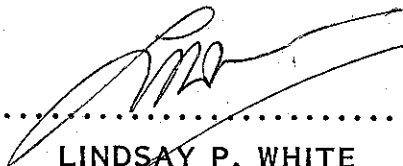
It is always a pleasure to record the indebtedness of the Cytology Service to a number of other organizations. The collaboration with Prince Henry's Hospital continues to be a most harmonious and mutually rewarding one. Appreciation is expressed to all those members of the hospital staff who continue to make available their time and expertise.

The continued support of the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria is also acknowledged with gratitude. Associated with the Service since its inception, and indeed central to its establishment, the Council has always been most generous in its support of all activities of the Service.

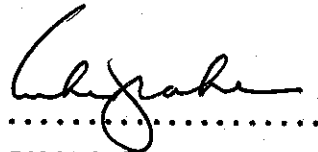
As in every report since the establishment of the Service the assistance of the Floral Group of Prince Henry's Hospital Auxiliaries is acknowledged with very deep and sincere appreciation. Members of this group attend the hospital regularly to pack the kits of materials used by the medical practitioners who refer smears to the Service. There is no doubt that this voluntary activity has saved the Service many thousands of dollars and been a significant factor in the economy of its operations.

CONCLUSION:

This report commenced with a reference to the increasing work load being experienced by the Service and the problems that this increase has created. Despite these problems the Service continues to function both efficiently and economically. There is no doubt, however, that modest additional support would lead to a much more effective screening programme - a key programme in the area of preventive medicine.



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LINDSAY P. WHITE
Acting Chairman



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MICHAEL DRAKE
Director