

CORRESPONDENCE

Death From Asthma

TO THE EDITOR:

Dr. Alexander's article "A Historical Account of Death from Asthma" was both interesting and stimulating. I should like to submit the following information inasmuch as I feel it does raise doubts concerning the observed "acceleration" in the number of asthma deaths during the "second period" and diminution in the "third period."

1. The sixth revision of the International Code for listing of deaths took effect in 1949. The change in coding accounted for a larger number of deaths assigned to asthma and was responsible, in great part, for the increase in the national death rate from 1.9 to 3.1.¹

2. In 1951 the decision was made that asthma was a possible underlying cause of vascular lesions affecting the central nervous system and diseases of the heart, increasing the number of deaths assigned to asthma from 4322 in 1950 to 6871 in 1951.²

3. The seventh revision of the International Code for listing of deaths was made in 1958 and was responsible, in great part, for the decrease in death rate from 3.9 in 1957 to 2.9 in 1958.³

Thus the changes in frequency of asthmatic deaths described by Alexander in both the second and third periods may, in fact, be due more to revisions in coding technique than to increases or decreases in deaths from asthma.

Paradoxically, in a research study being conducted at the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles, there appears to be a marked increase in asthma deaths in the "third period," since approximately 1950. We suspect that steroid therapy may be a contributing factor in the deaths of some of these children.

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REFERENCES

1. Vital Statistics: Special Reports for 1949, United States National Office of Vital Statistics.
2. Vital Statistics: Special Reports, United States National Office of Vital Statistics, 38: 66, 1954.
3. Vital Statistics: Special Reports for 1957 to 1959, United States National Office of Vital Statistics, 54: 9, 1961.

ASTHMATIC DEATH RATE—UNITED STATES

YEAR	DEATH RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION	YEAR	DEATH RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION
1943	1.7	1953	4.3
1944	1.8	1954	3.8
1945	1.8	1955	3.6
1946	1.8	1956	3.6
1947	1.9	1957	3.9
1948	1.9	1958	2.9
1949	3.1	1959	2.8
1950	2.9	1960	2.8 (est)
1951	4.5	1961	2.7 (est)
1952	4.5		