

Acceptance Speech of
PROFESSOR SIR RICHARD DOLL
Co. Winner of the 2005
King Faisal International Prize for Medicine
Sunday 10 April 2005 (1.3.1426H.)

Your Royal Highness, Prince Sultan Ibn Abd Al Aziz
Your Royal Highnesses
Your Excellencies
Distinguished Guests

It is with a sense of awe that I find myself here to receive the prestigious award of the King Faisal International Prize in Medicine. Like all young people who start on a career in medical research, I had in mind the hope that I might discover some fact that would add to knowledge about how diseases were caused or could be prevented. That I have been able to do so has been due to several pieces of good fortune. First, the problems I have studied proved capable of solution with the tools that I had to hand. Secondly, I have had the privilege of working with colleagues of outstanding ability. With the tools we had, Professor Bradford Hill and I were able to show that cigarette smoking was the principal cause of the enormous increase in the mortality from cancer of the lung. After we published our report, however, we met an unexpected obstacle which, in the event, turned out to be another piece of good fortune. For very few people, apart from Sir Harold Himsworth, then Secretary of the British Medical Research Council, believed our

conclusion and we were forced to think of an independent way by which we could test the validity of our findings. We consequently set out to see if knowledge of people's smoking habits would enable us to predict their risk of dying from lung cancer and we chose British doctors to help us by giving us the necessary information about themselves, on the grounds that they would be easy to follow up. Some 34000 male doctors agreed to help in this way and quite quickly, within 5 years, we found that our predictions were correct.

Unexpectedly, however, our findings also showed much more, for the longer we followed the doctors the more conditions we found that smoking was liable to cause.

Once again, your Royal Highness, fortune had favoured us in the choice of doctors to study, for seeing what was happening to their colleagues, many doctors gave up smoking and we were soon able to show that stopping smoking reduced the risk of fatal disease and that the earlier it was stopped the greater the reduction it was possible to achieve. The doctors, moreover, passed on the information to their patients and when the media, (press, radio and television) also became convinced of the validity of our findings and added their voice, the public began to give up smoking in progressively larger numbers, with the result that mortality rates throughout the UK fell and many premature deaths were avoided. In 1970 it was estimated that 116,000 deaths in men were attributable to smoking, which was more than a third, of the total (35%) while in 2000 the number had fallen to 63 000 which was under a quarter (22%).

The tobacco industry, however, seemed not to care about the harm it was doing and, as sales in the UK and many other economically developed countries in Europe, North America, and Australia fell, the industry turned its attention more and more to promoting sales in the Arabic world, Asia, Africa and South America. The award of the King Faisal Prize for our work on the effects of smoking will, I believe, go a long way towards negating the efforts by the tobacco industry. For the authority of the prize is such that many people in these countries, who would not otherwise have done so, will take seriously the results of our work and that of the many other people who have now also studied the subject. The award will help people throughout the world to appreciate the harm that cigarette smoking does and to resist pressure from the tobacco industry to buy cigarettes, without having to experience the immensity of the harm directly in their own countries.

For my own part, it would, I think, be presumptuous to expect that at my age I could initiate any worthwhile new research, which almost always takes several years to complete. What I can do is to help young doctors who want to undertake research in preventive medicine, something that I can do by giving ear-marked support to the College in Oxford to which I have been most recently attached: namely Green College. The college is for graduate students and its mission is (I quote) "to provide academic, administrative and social support for Fellows, Students, Common Room members, and Academic visitors, working in human health and welfare". It was established 25 years ago and every

year there is greater pressure on it to admit and provide facilities for a greater number of graduate students. The college is seeking to do that by new building and, if I can help it with the prize money, I have it in mind that one room in the building should be named after King Faisal and a scholarship provided which would contribute to the college fees of a student wishing to undertake research in preventive medicine, preferably one from an Arabic or other Muslim country. Tremendous advances have been made in medicine in my life-time, your Royal Highness, and much disease can be cured that used to cause serious disability and premature death. Prevention, nevertheless, still remains better than cure and, if by this award I can help more doctors to undertake research in preventive medicine, it will increase still further my gratitude for the honour of receiving it.