age-group in order to prevent reidentification of the 1 eliminated case by the disagreement of the cause-specific records with the total sum of deaths accessible from routine publications of the statistical offices.

Based on the negative experiences with this "research paragraph", the revised version of the federal law on statistics from the year 1984 [8] included a specified paragraph (§ 16), which does not put emphasis upon technical exclusion in the possibility of reidentification. Anonymous data may be received for clearly defined research projects, even if reindentification cannot be completely excluded; emphasis is put now on the condition that the theoretically possible reidentification would require a disproportionately high expenditure of time, costs and work.

CANCER REGISTRIES

Registries for cancer incidence exist, thus far, only as regional registries in Hamburg and in the Saarland. Cancer registration was, of course, most directly and seriously concerned by data protection legislation. Work of the cancer registry in the Saarland had to be suspended after enaction of the federal data protection law in 27 January 1977. A special law for this register allowed reactivation in the year 1979. This is in accordance with the general demand of the privacy act that person-related data may be processed only if the concerned person has agreed or a specified act allows and regulates it. Because the Saarland register does not ask cancer patients for agreement, a specified act had to be installed. Case-recruitment for epidemiological case-control studies remains, however, prohibited by the new legislation. A similar mechanism was to be initiated to save already collected data and future work of the country-wide register of the former GDR after German unification. This register had also to stop its work immediately after unification, but the atmosphere is nowadays more clearly pro cancer registration.

At the moment, in all Federal states of Germany, cancer registration acts are in preparation. Reporting mechanisms are, however, still under discussion. The present legal framework allows the installation of all variants of reporting procedures, including those which are the most recommended for a powerful epidemiological use of the registry data. It is purely a political decision which regulation will finally be enacted.

CONCLUSIONS

Privacy acts of the late 1970s and similar regulations of older laws tended to severly hamper epidemiological research in Germany. Developments of the recent years allow, however, a more optimistic interpretation. These privacy acts can be considered as first attempts of working in a new field of legislation, having had some very unpleasant effects on scientific research. Updates made in recent years show that efforts have been undertaken to create juristic rules that enable scientific research within the framework of privacy standards. Most of these new regulations we can live with, but some of the old laws, still in operation, continue to hamper work of cancer epidemiology and need further endeavours to modify them.

European cooperation is attempting to harmonise national privacy regulations. Epidemiologists should follow closely these discussions and put forward their research requirements. The German example shows that one-sided emphasis upon privacy may injure biomedical research considerably. It also shows, however, that juristic standards can be developed which make research requirements consistent with privacy legislation. This goal is what we should aspire to.

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Education and Training in Oncology

THIS ISSUE of the European Journal of Cancer contains the first in what will be a biannual feature. 'Education and Training in Oncology', edited by Dr Alberto Costa, Director of the European School of Oncology in Milan, will contain articles of international interest on all aspects of education and training as well as a directory of European-based courses.

We would be pleased to consider information on courses in oncology for publication in the next issue of 'ETO', and application forms are available from the European School of Oncology at the address on page 791.

Michael Peckham
Editor in Chief
European Journal of Cancer