



American Cancer Society 1999 Annual Report

By Mark Ray

The Challenge

In 1961, just four years after Sputnik, President John F. Kennedy stood in the well of the United States Senate and challenged America to go to the moon before the decade was out. And America went.

In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and challenged America to keep its promise to all its citizens. By 1965, Congress had passed two major pieces of civil rights legislation.

In 1970, after Senator Ralph Yarborough had watched several loved ones die of cancer, he called for a renewed national commitment to fighting the disease. A year later, President Richard Nixon signed the National Cancer Act of 1971, launching a quarter century of unprecedented advances in cancer prevention, early detection tests, and treatment.

This past year, the American Cancer Society embarked on a new challenge: to build on the successes of the past and marshal all our resources to measurably and significantly reduce the threat of cancer. And to do it in our lifetimes.

It's a bold challenge, a difficult task. But it's one that America can and should rise up to meet.

The time is now. The tools are at hand. The challenge is before us.

Controlling Cancer

What does it mean to control cancer? Given the nature of the disease and our environment, it is unlikely that cancer will ever be completely eliminated or that a single pill or vaccine will ever protect us completely from the disease.

But we at the American Cancer Society feel strongly that one day—and soon—cancer will be reduced to a chronic, treatable condition, not a life-threatening disease. Already, cancer is the most preventable and treatable of the major chronic illnesses, and advances on the horizon are hastening the day when cancer loses its place as the most feared disease in America.

When that day comes, we will all have reason to celebrate. For it will take the efforts of all of us to achieve victory. It will take voluntary not-for-profit organizations working hand in hand with private companies and government agencies. It will take America's eight million cancer survivors turning their experience into action on behalf of others. It will take the financial support of individuals and businesses. And it will take the efforts of talented researchers and dedicated volunteers.

It will also take vision and leadership. Through its far-reaching programs and presence in every community, the American Cancer Society is uniquely positioned to mold that vision and help move the cancer community—and the nation—toward our common goal.

For more than 85 years, the American Cancer Society has been at war against cancer, winning battle after battle, always moving us closer to the goal of controlling the disease. Many organizations fight hard and well against cancer, but only the American Cancer Society brings to this collaborative effort the resources to fight every form of the disease on all fronts: through research, education, advocacy, and service. As a result, we have a unique perspective and can have an unparalleled impact on the disease.

To make this impact even more meaningful, we took several key steps this year. We developed objectives that will guide our path over the next 15 years, we conducted a community-by-community assessment of needs, issues, and barriers, and we created a nationwide program of work that will serve as a blueprint for cancer control efforts in the years to come.

Everything the American Cancer Society represents can be summed up in three simple words—hope, progress, answers—words that can mean so much to those who have heard the frightening words, “You have cancer.”

Hope is a cancer survivor turned mentor and friend. Progress is a researcher who has discovered a clue to the mystery of cancer. Answers are what cancer information specialists provide 24 hours a day.

In the next few pages, you'll discover how hope, progress, and answers defined the American Cancer Society over the past 12 months.

Hope

The Power of Prevention and Early Detection

One of the most powerful weapons of hope in the fight against cancer is prevention. If no one used tobacco, for example, cancer deaths would drop by 30 percent. If people maintained healthy diets, one third of cancer deaths would be prevented. If physical activity levels increased, still more lives would be saved.

The Society has long provided Americans with sound, unbiased cancer prevention information—much of it based on discoveries made by our own epidemiologists. To spread the message of prevention this year, we doubled the resources available on our web site—already an unparalleled source of prevention information—and increased the capacity of our 24-hour-a-day call center. Now, hope is at hand every minute of every day for anyone who needs it.

This year, we also launched Y2Kidz.org, a nationwide online think tank designed to give us insight into what young people are thinking about issues related to cancer and its prevention, including smoking and other risk behaviors. This new web site complements the Society's other efforts to reach young people with positive lifestyle messages, including our emphasis on school-based health education.

While Y2Kidz.org builds relationships on a national level, we are also building relationships in every community across America, relationships that encourage people to get early detection tests and, if cancer is discovered, to stay the course through treatment and recovery. For example, in "Tell A Friend," a nationwide ACS program, trained community volunteers contact friends, family members, and acquaintances to encourage them to get a mammogram. Community volunteers also actively support patients during treatment and recovery, whether they are breast cancer survivors in the Society's "Reach to Recovery" program who listen and respond to concerns of people facing a cancer diagnosis or neighbors who commit their time and resources to driving patients to and from treatment.

Closing the Gap

Early detection of cancer is prevention's companion. It means that somewhere, a mother will watch her daughter graduate from college. It means that somewhere, a grandfather can fly a kite with his grandson. In the last half century, early detection tests for many types of cancer have made these moments possible for millions of Americans.

But serious gaps remain—between state of the science and state of the practice, for example, and between early detection rates for minorities and the majority population. In 1998-99, we continued working to close those gaps.

For example, if caught early, the 5-year survival rate for colorectal cancer—the third deadliest cancer for both men and women— jumps from 9 percent to over 90 percent. Yet fewer than 40 percent of adults over 50 get the vital early detection tests that could literally save their lives.

To improve these numbers, in 1999 we worked with the Cancer Research Foundation of America and the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable to have March 2000 declared the first official National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month by the US Senate, launching an effort to generate widespread awareness about colorectal cancer and to encourage people to learn more about how to reduce their risk of the disease through regular early detection tests and a healthy lifestyle.

In the case of prostate cancer, the most common cancer among men, we're making efforts to improve the early detection rates for African-Americans. African Americans are 50 percent more likely than Caucasians to develop prostate cancer—and twice as likely to die from the disease. One way we have worked to raise awareness of the disease among African American men is through a public and media relations campaign featuring well-known celebrities Harry and Shari Belafonte. The father-daughter team bring credibility to the issue, given Harry Belafonte's personal experience with prostate cancer. In addition, we partnered with 100 Black Men of America, Inc. to develop an aggressive outreach program called "Let's Talk about It: A Prostate Health Education Program for African-American Men." This highly successful program provides African-American men with current, reliable information on prostate cancer testing and treatment options and links them with health resources in their communities.

Offering Support

Who better to understand the uncertainty, confusion, and despair of hearing the words "You have cancer" than one who has heard those words and survived? More than eight million Americans alive today have had cancer, and thousands of those survivors now serve as ACS volunteers, particularly in our patient support programs. They serve as mentors to patients. They speak at support group meetings. They give of their time and themselves, to bring hope to cancer patients and their families.

This year the Society marked the 30th anniversary of Reach to Recovery, a program that pairs breast cancer survivors with breast cancer patients. In marking this anniversary, we conducted Expressions of Courage, a national juried art competition designed to celebrate the spirit of breast cancer survivorship. The winning piece, "Light, Grace, and Spirit" by Mississippi artist Paula Temple, vividly depicts the breast cancer journey and

has been exhibited nationwide and featured on national television, further heightening awareness of breast cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery.

We also teamed this year with AirLifeLine, a national not-for-profit organization that provides free air transportation to patients who cannot afford the cost of travel to medical facilities. Through AirLifeLine, more than 1,000 private pilots donate their time, aircraft, and fuel to ensure that cancer patients get to medical facilities for diagnosis and throughout the course of treatment. By partnering with AirLifeLine, we are helping patients complete their treatment plan, which is so essential to recovery.

Relay For Life

Perhaps the most visible way that the Society offers hope is through Relay For Life, our signature event that took place in nearly 2,500 communities across the country this year. Through Relay, we can develop relationships and introduce millions of Americans to our programs.

Relay For Life generates significant income for the Society, but the numbers only tell part of the story. Part endurance contest, part all-night bash, Relay For Life brings together teams of 15 or more volunteers to raise money for cancer by walking endless circles around a track. Costumes, live bands, dunking booths, and more give the event a festive atmosphere.

Many of those who come to Relay are cancer patients and survivors. Many are the loved ones of people who have fought cancer and won—or fought and lost. In gratitude or hope, memory or sorrow, they come by the tens of thousands to attack cancer with the best weapon they have: themselves.

The red sashes worn by cancer survivors at Relay remind everyone of victories won, while the rows of luminaries—each lit for someone touched by cancer—remind us all that the fight against cancer must go on.

Progress

Finding a Cure

Since its inception, the ACS has committed more than \$2.2 billion to the scientific study of cancer causes and cures. And the progress we've seen toward improved early detection, diagnosis, and treatment has been astounding. This year alone, the Society invested nearly \$108 million in cancer research and health professional training, a 7-percent increase over last year. But the Society's commitment to research does not end with our own resources. We aggressively advocate for increased cancer funding by the government.

The lion's share of ACS research dollars support investigators and health professionals in universities, medical schools, research institutions, cancer centers, and hospitals throughout the country. In all, we awarded 420 extramural grants this year. Most of the investigators we support are at the beginning of their careers, a critical period when it's difficult for them to obtain funding from federal sources. Others are pursuing research in underfunded areas or are pursuing nontraditional research ideas. All have the potential to make key discoveries that could hasten our progress toward conquering cancer. In addition to beginning researchers, the Society provides important, flexible funding to its 27 ACS Research and Clinical Research Professors, the nation's preeminent group of oncology scientists.

The Society also maintains its own epidemiological and surveillance research program, which monitors and analyzes patterns and trends in the occurrence of cancer, risk factors for cancer, utilization of early detection tests, and patient care. It was ACS epidemiologists who first demonstrated the link between smoking and lung cancer and who—by continuing to mine data from the largest epidemiological study in the world—are showing how family history, lifestyle choices, and environmental factors influence cancer development. This year, for example, the Society published data supporting the hypothesis that inherited cancer-susceptibility genes increase the risk for cancer at many sites and are not specific to cancer risk at one single site.

Since 1995, the Society has funded and housed one of only two behavioral research centers in the world. A better understanding of why we behave the way we do is critical if we are to persuade our citizens to pursue healthy lifestyles. This year, the American Cancer Society's Behavioral Research Center (BRC) conducted a survey showing that cigar smokers believed themselves to be at much less risk of cancer than was actually the case. The BRC is also vitally interested in the needs and problems of the more than eight million cancer survivors in America today. The Study of Cancer Survivors will follow survivors for up to 10 years with periodic questionnaires focused on their quality of life and the unmet needs of survivors and their families. The BRC is also conducting a study on the use of complementary therapies by cancer survivors.

Exciting Discoveries

During the past decade—and even during the past year—the pace of cancer research has accelerated at an incredible rate. At the American Cancer Society, we are proud of the role we have played in many recent victories.

Last year, for example ACS Research Professor Robert A. Weinberg, PhD, of the Whitehead Institute, took a key step toward solving the mystery of how cancer happens. In a first for laboratory research, he created a tumor cell from a normal human cell, mimicking the cancer process and enabling researchers to study the beginnings of cancer and its deadly spread throughout the body with much greater understanding than before.

The Human Genome Project, now five years ahead of schedule, is quickly changing the pace of cancer research. Soon scientists will possess the entire blueprint of the body's genetic structure and will understand the function of every single human gene. That knowledge will give researchers powerful new weapons in the fight against cancer. It's only a matter of time before they can produce a genetic profile to tailor specific treatments for each patient, as well as to design individual prevention strategies for people with different levels of genetic risk. Society grantees are among the leading researchers merging biology with technology to create a new era in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer.

The vital contributions of the Society's research program was demonstrated again this year when Gunter Blobel, MD, PhD, received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for discovering the signals that direct proteins to their proper location within a cell. Dr. Blobel, the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Professor of Cell Biology at the Rockefeller University and Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator, is the 30th Nobel Prize recipient whose work was supported by the Society before he won the prize. No other private, nonprofit research-funding organization can claim as many Nobel laureates among its grantees.

The Society annually receives nearly 2,000 applications for research and health-professional training grants. This year, we initiated plans that will significantly enhance the procedure by which those applications are evaluated. Beginning next year, cancer survivors or other nonscientists who are committed to the future of cancer research will join each of the Society's 18 peer review committees. As full voting members of the committees, these stakeholders will bring a new and different perspective to the grant review process.

Advocating for a Healthier Tomorrow

While much of our progress against cancer occurs in the laboratory, many significant gains are also made in the halls of federal, state, and local governments. The goal of our advocacy efforts is to ensure that issues related to cancer get the attention, the legislative action, and the funding they deserve.

One of our key victories in 1999 was to secure additional federal funding for cancer research, prevention, and early detection, as well as for quality cancer care for the medically underserved. In fact, the Society was in the forefront of efforts to successfully advocate for a 15-percent increase in funding for cancer research at the National Institutes of Health and a significant increase in funding for tobacco and cancer control initiatives at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Another major advocacy achievement in 1999 grew from the multi-state tobacco settlement. Through Operation Settle Up, we helped secure nearly \$300 million in settlement money earmarked for state tobacco prevention and control programs in 15 states, thus providing additional resources to protect children and adults from addiction, tobacco-related cancer, and death. While some politicians have viewed the tobacco settlement money as a no-strings-attached windfall, we were able to convince lawmakers in these 15 states to fund vital tobacco control efforts instead.

The ACS Action Network—our national grassroots network of individuals who are committed to fighting cancer by calling, writing, and visiting their elected representatives and policymakers—continued to grow in 1999. It now has more than 112,000 members throughout the country.

Through this volunteer/staff partnership, we continued to make significant headway in advancing other issues critical to winning the war on cancer. For example, we ensured that access to clinical trials was part of the national debate on patient-protection legislation and succeeded in securing a provision in every patient-protection bill considered by Congress in 1998-1999. The Society's advocacy efforts also directly contributed to passage of the Bipartisan Compromise Managed Care Improvement Act of 1999 (HR 2723) in the US House of Representatives.

ACS continues to call on Congress to fund initiatives that would allow uninsured women with cancer to receive the treatment services they need. Moreover, the Society believes that a comprehensive federal health agenda can be truly effective in decreasing cancer mortality and incidence only if it addresses *all* populations, including the poor and underserved. We cannot hope to reduce the burden of cancer for people of color, for the poor, and for medically underserved populations without creative public health initiatives that overcome the many barriers to care—socioeconomic, cultural,

geographic, and educational—that threaten our ability to effectively reach and serve these populations.

Answers

Answers as Close as the Phone

When cancer touches people's lives, they seek answers to many questions: What does the diagnosis mean? What are my treatment options? Will I lose my hair? My job? My life?

The American Cancer Society is the leading resource for unbiased cancer-related information and services, and for the last two years we've been making that information available to all who need it anytime, anywhere, through a toll-free number: 1-800-ACS-2345. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, highly trained cancer information specialists and oncology nurses take questions, listen to concerns, and provide answers. They take as much time as callers need; they refer callers to additional cancer resources available at the community level; and they do it all for free.

In its first month of operation back in 1997, our toll-free information line took 720 calls. This year, we answered more than 72,000 calls per month. Bilingual operators are available, and many materials have been translated into Spanish.

We continued to expand our call center operation this year to meet the growing demand. When the operation reaches its full potential, we will have the capacity to answer more than three million calls a year, bringing lifesaving cancer information to more people than ever before.

Answers on the Web

If the Society's call center puts information and community resources as close as the nearest phone, the Society's web site at www.cancer.org puts it as close as the nearest keyboard. Through the generosity of the Leo and Gloria Rosen family, more than 200,000 unique visitors are able to come to this site every month, accessing an unparalleled amount of unbiased cancer information.

This year, we revised the site's interface and doubled the number of resources available. New features include prevention and early detection information, information on health care providers and cancer hospitals, a cancer drug database (searchable by both brand and generic names), and a state-by-state directory of cancer resources. Visitors can easily order American Cancer Society books and brochures online or sign up for email that alerts them when new resources are added to the site. In addition, the site provides links to many other reputable cancer resources, providing visitors with a wealth of cancer information online.

Site visitors can also submit detailed questions to our online cancer information specialists, who answer more than 3,000 inquiries a month from all over the world. Like its call center counterpart, the online cancer information center is equipped to handle questions in a variety of languages, and many of its resources are now available in Spanish.

Funding the Fight

At its heart, the American Cancer Society is people. It is researchers devoted to finding a cure. It is survivors helping others become survivors themselves. It is volunteers teaching young people to protect themselves from cancer. And it is individuals, corporations, and foundations giving of their financial resources to ensure that the Society's work can continue and expand.

This year, more than five million Americans supported the Society financially, powerful testimony to the vital importance of our mission. From every state and every walk of life, our donors were united in the firm belief that each dollar raised saves lives, that each increase in funding means an increase in research, advocacy, outreach, and patient support in communities across America.

Our most visible resource development efforts are our special events. Making Strides Against Breast Cancer raises millions of dollars for research while also raising awareness of the importance of early detection. Relay For Life—now the largest single fundraising event in America—brings together a million and a half people in nearly 2,500 communities each year to fight cancer. And our balls and galas offer donors in many cities a festive way to show their support for the Society's programs.

But special events only tell part of the story. Millions of Americans fund the fight in other ways. Some make sizeable investments through our major gifts and planned giving programs. Others provide significant and lasting gifts through the American Cancer Society Foundation like Harold and Jean Grossman did with their endowment gift, providing income for breast cancer research until the disease is defeated. Still others donate through our memorial program, mail program, payroll deduction, or other annual campaigns. This year, we developed a corporate worksite initiative, which will, in future years, allow us to increase the level of support through employee campaigns and corporate gifts, and give us another avenue by which to recruit volunteers and extend our cancer-control efforts.

Support comes from other sources as well. For example, through the ACS Foundation, pharmaceutical companies are providing direct links from www.cancer.org to company sites, offering web site visitors current information on the latest cancer drugs. The Society also pursued a limited number of strategic collaborations with private

enterprises. These mission-driven collaborations are helping us further our reach and hasten our speed as we work toward our vision of cancer control.

The Challenge

Right now, an American Cancer Society volunteer is offering hope to someone who had lost it. Right now, an ACS-supported researcher is making progress toward another key breakthrough. Right now, an ACS call center specialist is giving answers to a new cancer patient. Right now, your support is helping the American Cancer Society provide hope, progress, and answers to the millions of Americans whose lives are touched by cancer each year.

But also right now, a normal cell is turning malignant. Right now, a patient is hearing the news she's been dreading. Right now, cancer is claiming another victim.

And so we must rededicate ourselves to fighting the disease. We must redouble our efforts toward finding a cure. And we must do it now.

In 1999, the American Cancer Society issued a bold challenge to America: to control cancer in our lifetimes. We stand ready to do our part, but we can't meet the challenge alone. Cancer is a powerful foe, and beating it will require the best efforts of all of us.

The challenge is before us. The tools are at hand. The time is now.