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BIO 1090-050

Taking Sides Assignment 2

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## **Are We Winning the War on Cancer?**

“We are winning the war on cancer.”<sup>1</sup> This is main claim that John R. Seffrin, PhD, the CEO of the American Cancer Society, enthusiastically made in the article *Winning the War on Cancer: Public Health or Public Policy Challenge?* Seffrin gives four facts that make up the context of his message which are: based on evidence, there is direct knowledge on how to win the war on cancer; as certain tasks/decisions are carried out, cancer will no longer be a health problem in the US; consequences will unfold if preventive methods and actions are not carried out so that cancer may be the leading cause of death in the near future; and that the world can treat these diseases based on choice, priority, resources, and resolve. Throughout his speech, Seffrin makes it clear that there are technology and health care methods available today to treat cancer patients all over the world that have arisen from the progress in science, specifically the mapping of the human genome. Seffrin takes a stand against the tobacco industry by revealing that tobacco has killed more than 4.9 million people in 2006 alone, and that that number is likely to increase in the future. He continues to list the consequences that tobacco has had and will have, but urges that communities and nations can take action by making restrictions on tobacco use and supporting the global public health treaty (World Health Organizations Framework Convention on Tobacco Control).

Reynold Spector, MD intensely opposes the idea of winning the war on cancer in the article *The War on Cancer: A Progress Report for Skeptics*. Spector reports that the current statistics in cause of death due to cancer, survival statistics for cancer patients, and definite causes of cancer, add up so much that the loss to cancer is much more than what is being saved. Because of this great loss, Spector is a skeptic when it comes to the idea of winning in this war on cancer. He gives charts and examples that help illustrate the impact cancer have had over a recorded history. Spector’s view overall is that even though advances have been made to help treat cancer, it is not enough to be declared a breakthrough and an actual victory over cancer.

Cancer is a grim foe that should be taken seriously. I believe a vast majority of people consciously think and contemplate how cancer is or will affect their lives. In this paper I will discuss both sides of this war against cancer, how it originates and why I think that we are winning despite some skepticism. To have a more accurate view of this war on cancer I will

include some survival statistics; methods of cancer therapy; and plans and organizations that assist people with cancer prevention, awareness and treatment.

Cancer is caused by a number of reasons, but it all starts when cells in the body mutate and stop following orders by multiplying when they are not supposed to and they fail to comply with a cell's scheduled death that naturally occurs. As these cells divide and multiply on each other it can become a tumor. These tumors may not start as cancerous or can be cancer-free the rest of an individual's life, yet when they do it can turn deadly. Cancer cells become especially dangerous as they spread through metastasis to different parts of the body. Some other causations of cancer are, but not limited to: diet intake of foods and drinks containing unhealthy chemicals; hereditary genes that trigger cell mutations; unhealthy physical state of the body due to lack of exercise, especially obesity; intake of hazardous drugs or materials, such as tobacco; and as the human body ages it's cells are more likely to make mistakes, particularly in cell division, which can lead to mutations and cancer.

If one looks at this war on cancer purely from a militaristic point of view, where the concept of winning is either dominating the foe entirely, or suppressing the foe with very few casualties, it may appear that we are losing. It may seem that we are winning battles but cancer is winning so far. This is how Spector sees this war as he stated, "unlike the success against heart disease and stroke, the war on cancer, after almost forty years, must be deemed a failure with a few notable exceptions."<sup>2</sup> Spector believes that cancer therapy is decades behind and the data he presents in his report are useful information but in reality do not give guidance on how to win against cancer.<sup>2</sup> Figure 2 from his data actually shows that cancer death rates are decreasing since thirty years ago.

Although cancer kills in one year more people than malaria, tuberculosis and HIV combined, Seffrin says that we are beginning to make headway on saving more lives. He stated that, "screening and follow-up treatment has reduced cervical cancer deaths as much as 80 percent ... with state-of-the-art cancer care, as many as 75 percent of cancer patients could survive long-term."<sup>1</sup>

Stories told today of those that have been diagnosed with cancer constantly have one thing in common; hope. There is hope and drive to continue research on cancer and treatment so that millions of people that have been affected can have a chance of overcoming cancer. In some ways cancer can be prevented and partially treated by giving the body adequate rest, relieving stress through positive activities, healthy dieting, getting physical exercise and obtaining proper screenings and regular check-ups with a physician.

Cancer therapy often involves surgery (if possible), chemotherapy and radiation therapy as well as proper medications. Early detection is possible through screening and follow-up treatment and with some cancers it can reduce deaths by a mass percentage. Unfortunately there is not a one-cure-fix-all for all cancers, but Seffrin claims that "achievements such as the

mapping of the human genome make new cancer cures virtually inevitable, if we ... fully fund NIH and its National Cancer Institute.”<sup>1</sup> Under his leadership, the Society (American Cancer Society) has become the world’s largest voluntary health organization fighting cancer, with a billion dollars in resources to save lives by helping people stay well and get well, by finding cures, and by fighting back.<sup>3</sup>

There are many organizations in the world today that have the main objective to find cures for cancer as well as better ways to treat cancer. President Nixon signed the Nation Cancer Act in hope that through research of cancer biology that a cure could be found. The American Cancer Society has fought to help fund cancer research as well as raise awareness to the public of progress made in treatments, ways to help prevent cancer and stay healthy, and how to get involved with local groups and discussions. Locally, the Huntsman Cancer Institute helps patients find treatment and physicians that can help, as well as conduct research and provide information on different cancers.<sup>4</sup>

Conclusively, cancer is very deadly and affects millions of people every year. Many of those lost to cancer don’t need to die if the right things are implemented and carried out. First more people need to be aware of cancer prevention and ways to stay healthy. Second, cancer research needs to be fully funded and treatments found thru research needs to be available to people all over the world, regardless of class, sex, ethnicity, or age. Fourth, nations and communities need to take action at banning harmful products that cause cancer, such as tobacco. Many nations and communities have already banned smoking and the US needs to join. In the end I will always hold true to by belief that even if only a few people are saved from cancer because of research and treatments, it is worth it. One of those affected by cancer may be a loved one, and if they were close to me I would want them to have a chance of overcoming cancer. We are winning the war against cancer because people’s lives are being saved, where if research, prevention and treatment were not implemented, they would be lost.

## Citations

1. Seffrin, John, R. Winning the War on Cancer: Public Health or Public Policy Challenge? (2013) Biology 1090 Human Biology Salt Lake Community College Taking Sides Readings. pgs 56-61
2. Spector, Reynold. The War on Cancer: A Progress Report for Skeptics (2013) Biology 1090 Human Biology Salt Lake Community College Taking Sides Readings. pgs 62-71
3. The American Cancer Society, INC. (2014) Web.  
<http://pressroom.cancer.org/JohnSeffrin>
4. Huntsman Cancer Institute University of Utah. (2014) Web.  
<http://healthcare.utah.edu/huntsmancancerinstitute/>