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WE ARE LOSING THE WINNABLE WAR AGAINST CANCER

Contrary to the recent highly publicized claims by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), Americans are getting *more* cancer than ever before. And rather than getting better, the problem is getting worse.

The claim by the NCI, announced in anticipation of the twenty-fifth Anniversary of the December 23, 1971 National Cancer Act launching "the War against Cancer", asserts that we have "turned the tide against cancer." As evidence, the NCI pointed to a "nearly 3% reduction" in cancer mortality from 1991-95, mostly due to a decline in lung cancer deaths from smoking in men, and to improved access to health care, particularly among African Americans.

Most importantly, while cancer deaths have declined very modestly, the number of people *getting* cancer in America has been and still is on the rise. The "tide against cancer" incidence has not only *not* been turned back, but continues to escalate now striking more than one in three, up from an incidence of one in four a few decades ago. In fact, cancer incidence is still increasing overall and for a broad range of cancers at all ages, including: childhood leukemia and brain cancer; testicular cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and melanoma among young and middle age adults; and prostate and breast cancers in older groups. Cancer incidence -- the total number of people getting cancer as opposed to the smaller numbers developing fatal cancers -- is a much more significant and accurate measure of cancer trends than is mortality.

Further, the picture on mortality, when examined closely, is less rosy than the NCI would have us believe. Since 1991, cancer mortality rates for Americans over the age of 65 continues its four-decade old climb, even after statistical adjustments for an aging population. Also, there has been a sharp increase in mortality from non-smoking related cancers, including multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, chronic leukemia, and pancreatic cancer.

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Cancer prevention through reduction of carcinogens in air, water, food, consumer products, and the workplace.
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Smoking apart, NCI's latest announcement makes only minimal reference to cancer prevention. More specifically, NCI continues to ignore or trivialize the wealth of information on avoidable exposures to petrochemical and other carcinogens in the workplace, air, water, food, cosmetics, and other consumer products and on the substantial scientific evidence linking such undisclosed exposures to the cancer epidemic. This clearly reflects the

continuing fixation of the NCI, and also the American Cancer Society, on diagnosis, treatment and basic molecular biology research with minimal priority for cancer prevention; cancer prevention programs receive only some 2% of NCI's \$2.2 billion annual budget.

"Rather than optimistic and ill-based assurances, the latest in a long series of smoke and mirror "breakthroughs" since 1971, drastic reforms shifting NCI priorities to cancer prevention are key to winning the losing war against cancer," urges Samuel S. Epstein, M.D., Chairman of the Cancer Prevention Coalition and Professor of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at the School of Public Health, University of Illinois Medical Center, Chicago. Such critical reforms are unlikely unless the public can be mobilized, along an AIDS Act-Up grass-roots model, to act on the belated realization that the cancer war is too important to be trusted to its myopic generals and big government bureaucrats.

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The Cancer Prevention Coalition (CPC) is a Chicago-based national coalition of leading independent experts on cancer prevention and public health, together with consumer, environmental, labor, public interest and women's health organizations.

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