

# CHAPTER 1

## LOSING THE WAR ON CANCER

### Even if We're Winning Some of the Battles

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On December 23, 1971, President Richard Nixon signed the National Cancer Act into law and the nation began a war that still rages more than four decades later. "I hope in the years ahead we will look back on this action today as the most significant action taken during my Administration," Nixon said as he signed the historic legislation.

The law unleashed an army of doctors and researchers and more than \$100 million in federal funds in an all-out effort to find a cure.<sup>1</sup>

Commanding this army was the newly created National Cancer Institute, a research arm under the National Institutes of Health with autonomous power and special budgetary authority. Its strategy would be to eliminate cancer by bombarding it with toxic drugs and radiation and literally cutting it out using aggressive surgery techniques. It has allocated billions to evaluate different agents in search of a sure-fire cure. Alongside, the medical industry also pulled out all stops, spending hundreds of millions more to research and develop treatments and new drugs.

Yet, more than 40 years later, while we might claim victory in some battles, cancer is still winning the war. Our failure is marked by the exponential growth in the number of Americans newly diagnosed with some form of cancer annually. This statistic has skyrocketed three-fold to 1.6 million in 2011 from when Nixon was president.

This disease remains the leading cause of death for children under 15, taking more victims than asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis and AIDS combined. Recent facts show that more than 1,500 people die from cancer each day, the equivalent of three fully loaded jumbo jets crashing and killing everyone on board 365 days a year, as *Newsweek's* Sharon Begley pointed out in a September 6, 2008 article.

The total annual number of deaths annually – almost 600,000 – is 50 percent higher than in 1971. Even adjusting these statistics for population growth, we've made only slim progress at staving off death from what is still the No. 2 killer in the United States.

#### **Fighting the Wrong War**

One of the 2012 ESPN Super Bowl broadcasts was a story about New York Giants linebacker Mark Herzlich. Mark grew up as the classic local sports hero, winning all kinds of awards in high

school and at Boston College, including being named the 2008 ACC Defensive Player of the Year. Sadly, shortly after being awarded, he was told he had Ewing's sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer. Two of the ESPN commentators discussing the story were Stuart Scott and Merrill Hoge, both of whom had also faced a cancer diagnosis.

Scott is 45 as of this writing. Sometime in 2007, Scott underwent chemotherapy when doctors discovered a malignancy in his colon when they were performing an emergency appendectomy. This condition has not yet dissipated, and he reportedly continues to receive chemotherapy and other related medical treatments.

In 2003, Hoge, known as “Hodgie” on ESPN’s “NFL Matchup,” was diagnosed with stage II non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Discovered after dealing with recurrent back pain, doctors found a two- to three-pound tumor the size of a small football behind his stomach and around his lower back.

As inspirational as these men are, you’d think at this stage, the story would be about the failure to prevent cancer in America today. You’d expect there to have been an uproar that after all this time and money poured into treatment and research, three athletes – one fresh out of college – actually ended up fighting for their lives against the ravages of this still-way-too-common disease.

Instead, the show perpetuated the ongoing media-driven fiction that says if we throw enough money at medical cancer research we will find a cure. The same story we’ve heard from doctors, research foundations and the “Pink” campaigns of the world for decades that drive or pay for the media we’re seeing and hearing.

Stories like this one from ESPN, while inspirational and emotional, continue mislead and to hold out false hope. The reality is that while we should all be very thankful that we win some of these battles, the current plan has come nowhere near winning the war.

Is our failure to lick cancer really just a matter of more time and money? Or are we fighting the wrong war to begin with?

The war we should be fighting would be one to educate people about how they can help their bodies do the job of fending off cancer – a job that their bodies were born to perform until modern society inundated us with chemicals, radiation and unhealthy lifestyles. This would lead people in the right direction and provide real and legitimate hope.

We need to fight cancer this way. We need to instruct people on how to boost their bodies’ immunity to kill cancer cells before they face a full-blown diagnosis. They need to aggressively address the hostile agents out there that are part of what brings on cancer. As obvious as this advice seems, the war on cancer has been almost exclusively an assault on the disease rather than an enlightened prevention campaign that clearly identifies things that cause cancer to develop.

That's a war we can win.

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<sup>i</sup> Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program. Cancer Facts & the War on Cancer. 2002.