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Pancreatic Cancer Facts 2010

Pancreatic cancer is one of the DEADLIEST CANCERS

- Pancreatic cancer is the 10th most commonly diagnosed cancer and the 4th leading cause of cancer death in the United States.[1]
- Pancreatic cancer has the highest mortality rate of all the major cancers: 94% of patients die within five years of diagnosis and only 6% survive more than five years. 75% of patients with pancreatic cancer die within the first year of diagnosis.[1]
- Unlike many other cancers, the survival rate for the disease has not improved substantially in nearly 40 years. Since 1975, the five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer has improved only from 3% to 6%. In fact, pancreatic cancer is the only one of the top 10 cancer killers that still has a five-year survival rate in the single digits.[1]
- It is estimated that 43,140 Americans will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2010 and that 36,800 will die from the disease.[1]
- The number of new pancreatic cancer cases and the number of deaths caused by the disease are increasing – not decreasing. In fact, the expected number of new pancreatic cancer cases is projected to increase by 55% between the years 2010 and 2030.[2]
- The incidence of pancreatic cancer is 50% higher among African Americans than in any other racial group in the United States.[3]

Little is known about risk factors and there are NO EARLY DETECTION METHODS

Today, only a few risk factors for pancreatic cancer are known. More research is needed to understand their direct relationship to the disease. Further complicating matters, there are no early detection methods and most symptoms are vague and could be attributed to many different conditions.

- Symptoms include: pain (usually abdominal or back pain), weight loss, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), loss of appetite, nausea, changes in stool, and diabetes.
- The disease is often diagnosed in late stages due to the location of the pancreas in the body, the absence of definitive symptoms, and the lack of early detection methods. In fact, 52% of patients are diagnosed when they have advanced (metastatic) disease that has already spread to other organs.[4]

Treatment options are EXTREMELY LIMITED

There are currently no curative treatments for pancreatic cancer. Research in this area is desperately needed.

- Surgery currently offers the best opportunity for long-term survival. However, only about 15% of cases are diagnosed early enough for surgery[5]. Furthermore, approximately 80% of the patients who undergo surgery will have recurrence of the disease and die within five years.[6] The most common surgical procedure to remove tumors in the pancreas is called the Whipple procedure (pancreaticoduodenectomy). Surgery may be followed by chemotherapy or chemotherapy with radiation.
- For the patients who are not surgical candidates, chemotherapy or chemotherapy with radiation is typically offered.
- Only two drugs are currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat pancreatic cancer: gemcitabine (Gemzar®), which was approved for such use in 1996, and erlotinib (Tarceva®) which was approved in 2005. While these treatments can be beneficial in treating some patients, they are not considered curative.

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Unique research challenges require SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS

Some aspects of pancreatic cancer research present unique and significant challenges. The challenges are not insurmountable, but disease-specific solutions focused on improving survival rates are required. Furthermore, solving the most difficult and challenging problems will spur greater scientific advances in the entire field of cancer research.

- Historically, pancreatic cancer research has been drastically underfunded. Only 2% of the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) budget is currently allocated to this leading killer.
- Pancreas tissue is very difficult to obtain for research. The pancreas is located deep within the abdomen and is not easy to reach for tissue samples. Also, patients often die quickly due to the aggressive nature of the disease and late diagnoses.
- Pancreatic tumors are unique in the types of cells that make up the tumor. Pancreatic tumors include dense fibrotic cells that may contribute to their remarkable resistance to chemotherapy.
- Patient participation in clinical trials is limited because patients are often extremely sick and die quickly from the disease.

What we are asking from CONGRESS & THE ADMINISTRATION

The statistics call for aggressive measures to develop early detection and treatment tools before incidence dramatically increases, but NCI funding is not keeping pace. Predictable and sustainable funding increases for NCI are critical, particularly to provide sufficient funding for the deadliest cancers, such as pancreatic cancer.

While increasing overall cancer research funding is important, we must also take steps to ensure that there is a strategic plan and accountability for making progress on pancreatic cancer. *The Pancreatic Cancer Research & Education Act* (S.3320/ H.R. 745) will provide the NCI with the necessary resources and tools to finally make true progress against this disease. Key components of the bill include asking the NCI to develop a strategic plan for pancreatic cancer research that will provide direction and accountability for federal research funds; creating a cancer research incubator pilot project for the deadliest cancers; strengthening and expanding centers of excellence for pancreatic cancer; and promoting physician and public awareness. We need Congress to pass this legislation and then provide full funding to implement it so that we can offer newly diagnosed patients true hope – a marked difference from where we stand today.

The Pancreatic Cancer Action Network calls on the 111th Congress to give current and future pancreatic cancer patients a fighting chance by:

- Co-sponsoring the *Pancreatic Cancer Research & Education Act* (S. 3320/ H.R. 745).
- Ensuring that the NCI has predictable and sustainable funding that also allows for progress in diseases like pancreatic cancer by providing $5.79 billion for the NCI in FY 2011.

[1] American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures 2010*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society; 2010. The top 5 cancer killers are (in order): lung, colon, breast, pancreatic, and prostate.
[2] Smith BD, Smith GL, Hurria A, Hortobagyi GN, Buchholz TA. Future of Cancer Incidence in the United States: Burdens Upon an Aging, Changing Nation. *J Clin Oncol*. 2009.
[3] http://www.path.jhu.edu/pancreas/PartAfAm.php?area=pa. Accessed June 2009.
[4] Jemal A, Siegel R, Ward E, Hao Y, Xu J, Thun MJ. Cancer Statistics, 2009. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2009.
[5] Li D, Xie K, Wolff R, Abbruzzese JL. Pancreatic Cancer. *Lancet.*2004; 363:1049 – 1057.
[6] Oettle H, Post S, Neuhaus P, et al. Adjuvant Chemotherapy With Gemcitabine vs Observation in Patients Undergoing Curative-Intent Resection of Pancreatic Cancer: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *JAMA*. 2007;297:267-277.

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