American Cancer Society Calls for Year-Round Community Efforts to Reduce Cancer in Ethnic Minorities

National Minority Cancer Awareness Week is an Opportunity to Join the American Cancer Society in Helping to Save Lives from Cancer

Atlanta 2009/04/20 -National Minority Cancer Awareness Week is April 19-25, and the American Cancer Society is encouraged by the progress being made among racial and ethnic populations in the fight against this disease – its latest Colorectal Cancer Facts & Figures reported a steady decline in colon cancer incidence and death rates in most racial/ethnic groups. Yet, cancer continues to take a higher toll on minority communities according to the American Cancer Society.

National Minority Cancer Awareness Week is an opportunity to continue to push for progress among minority communities in the fight against cancer. The American Cancer Society is already leading the fight by helping people stay well through prevention and early detection; by helping people get well at every step of the cancer experience; by finding cures through groundbreaking research; and by fighting back through public policy and community mobilization.

Although progress has been reported, more work remains in reducing the cancer burden on minority communities. According to Society reports, racial and ethnic minorities still tend to receive lower-quality health care than whites even when insurance status, income, age and severity of conditions are comparable; and are still more likely to be diagnosed with cancer at a later stage when treatment is less successful. The American Cancer Society recognizes that the burden of cancer is unequal across racial and ethnic groups, and is playing an active role in decreasing and contributing to the elimination of disparities, currently supporting grants totaling more than $64 million for cancer disparities research and in turn, saving more lives.

“We’re encouraged by the progress made in the fight against cancer in minorities, but we also want this fight to be a community effort,” Otis W. Brawley, M.D., chief medical officer, American Cancer Society. “We encourage minority communities to join the American Cancer Society and make changes that will benefit them in the long run and save lives, such as creating neighborhood walk groups or initiating healthy eating programs in churches to help communities stay well and reduce cancer risk.”

Minority populations across the country can access information and services provided by the American Cancer Society to reduce the burden of cancer in their communities. Resources such as the free 24-hour National Cancer Information Center, which can be reached at 1-800-227-2345, can help answer any question about cancer, can provide information on what resources exist for free or low cost cancer screenings, and can assist smokers who want to quit in making a plan to do so through Quitline.

About fifty percent of cancer deaths can be prevented through regularly scheduled screenings, healthy eating, regular physical activity and quitting tobacco use. However, minorities continue to have lower screening rates than whites; report less leisure-time activity than recommended – less than the recommended 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity above usual activities on five or more days per week; and consume less fruits, vegetables and whole grains. The American Cancer Society recommends eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day, choosing whole grains in preference to processed grains and limiting consumption of processed and red meats.

The American Cancer Society wants to empower minority communities in the fight against cancer and is doing so by tailoring services towards various racial and ethnic groups, and partnering with trusted community resources such as national African American Greek organizations and community based medical associations like the National Medical Association. “We are already in these communities, whether it’s through our patient navigator program that helps newly diagnosed cancer patients figure out the resources available to them, or our free transportation services to and from cancer treatment, and we want racial and ethnic groups to be aware of and utilize these resources,” Brawley said.

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives,

diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

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