

American Cancer Society Launches Nationwide Awareness Campaign to Spotlight Challenges to the U.S. Health Care System

Atlanta 2007/09/17 -The American Cancer Society, the nation's largest voluntary health organization, today announced a major nationwide initiative to call attention to the urgent need for quality, affordable health care for all Americans. As part of the initiative, which is an unprecedented effort in the 94-year history of the organization, the Society will devote significant resources toward creating an aggressive public awareness campaign that highlights the barriers that average Americans, including the 47 million who do not have health insurance and the countless others who have inadequate insurance, confront when facing cancer.

"The American Cancer Society believes that, after tobacco use, lack of access to quality health care in the United States could be the biggest barrier to continued progress in the fight against cancer," said Richard C. Wender, M.D., national volunteer president of the Society. "Cancer is the number one personal health concern of Americans. Reducing suffering and death from cancer may only truly be possible if all Americans are able to visit their doctor for regular check ups, early detection screening tests and prompt, quality cancer treatment if and when they need it."

Through the use of an emotional advertising campaign, which includes nationwide television, print and online components, the Society tells the stories of real people who faced cancer diagnoses and typify the all-too-real stories of millions of others. One ad features "Kathy" who had no insurance when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Another ad tells the story of "Raina" who had insurance when she faced thyroid cancer but still faced financial debt that resulted in her medical bills being turned over to collection agencies.

"People expect that their insurance will be sufficient should they be faced with a major illness," Wender said. "Unfortunately, millions of Americans think they are covered, but find out too late that their insurance is inadequate, and as a consequence they often face substantial financial burdens, including being denied the care they need. No one should have to choose between taking care of their health and paying their bills."

Recent Society scientific research published in the peer-reviewed journal *CANCER* has shown that people who are uninsured, and people with certain types of public health insurance, are more likely to be diagnosed with more advanced cancer compared to those with private insurance, and, as a result, are at greater risk of death. These patients face much more difficult and far more expensive medical treatments, as well as a diminished quality of life – unnecessary realities had current advances in cancer prevention, detection and treatment options been more easily available.

"As a member of civil society, we have made tremendous progress in the fight against cancer, but that progress will not continue unless all Americans have access to quality health care," said John R. Seffrin, Ph.D., the Society's national chief executive officer. "To make the next significant leap, we have to make it easier for Americans to get the tests and treatments they need to fight cancer. It's a battle the American Cancer Society is fighting on behalf of every American—regardless of their financial ability or health care history. Is the choice between losing your life and losing everything really a choice?"

The public awareness campaign directs Americans to the Society's Web site, www.cancer.org, and encourages them to learn more about access to quality cancer care and to share their own story. Consumers can also join the Society's sister advocacy organization, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action NetworkSM (ACS CAN), in its grassroots campaign to make certain the issue a priority in the 2008 elections.

The American Cancer Society has issued four principles that define meaningful health insurance and highlight major problems in the health care system that are impeding progress against cancer and other major diseases. The principles state that health insurance should be adequate, affordable, available and administratively simple. The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network will apply the four principles to federal and state health insurance reform proposals to determine whether the proposals would improve health care for the uninsured and underinsured.

The Society, through a joint effort with Georgetown University Health Policy Institute, has been tracking individual health insurance coverage concerns for cancer patients and analyzing trends and emerging issues since 2005. Through its Health Insurance Assistance Service, located within the Society's nationwide call center in Austin, Texas, clinically trained telephone specialists help cancer patients or their loved ones who call the Society's 24 hour toll-free information line to navigate the health insurance system and understand all available options to pay for care. As a non-profit organization with limited resources, the American Cancer Society is only able to currently provide the service in 28 states, and so far, can only successfully help one in every five callers resolve their health insurance problems.

The Society also works to help cancer patients navigate their cancer experience through its Cancer Resource Network, which offers information to help patients and caregivers understand their specific disease and diagnosis, make their own treatment decisions, and cope with the often devastating effects of cancer on their lives. The Society also enjoys a long history of helping cancer patients and their loved ones with day-to-day concerns such as transportation and lodging necessary for accessing treatment; and it offers emotional support by helping locate local support groups and maintaining online patient and survivor support communities.

The Society and ACS CAN have long supported public policies and government programs that help people gain greater access to lifesaving cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment programs. This year, both the Society and ACS CAN successfully advocated Congress and the President to renew and authorize increased funding for the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This program provides breast and cervical cancer screenings and treatment for low-income, uninsured, or underinsured women. The organizations also back similar legislation, the Colorectal Cancer Early Detection, Prevention and Treatment Act, that would provide access to colon cancer screenings and treatment for low-income men and women.

Earlier this year, ACS CAN joined forces with AARP, the Alzheimers Association, the American Diabetes Association and the American Heart Association to focus attention on the need for access to quality health care as a priority issue in the presidential election campaign. Volunteer advocates from each group visited the campaign offices of the presidential candidates in Iowa and New Hampshire and held advocacy trainings for volunteers in Nevada and South Carolina. The groups' efforts are continuing with citizen speakout events that focus on access to care, and candidate tracking efforts in which volunteers attend candidate events to ensure that the issue of access to care holds a prominent place in the public debate leading up to the 2008 elections.

To learn more about the Society's efforts on access to healthcare and how people can get involved, visit www.cancer.org/access or call 1-800-ACS-2345.

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.

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