

Cancer Cure? Experts Cautious but Hopeful

By ALAN C. DAVIS

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When will a cure for cancer be found?

This question is more important to many people than the war in Vietnam, world poverty, or any other issue. Ninety per cent of people recently polled in the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy and West Germany believe that finding a cure for cancer is the most important issue facing the world between 1968 and the year 2000.

In order to gain perspective as to just when the world might see a cure for this disease which is western civilization's second greatest killer, several ex-presidents of the American Cancer Society were recently asked: How far in the future do you see the conquest of cancer?

Their responses reflect caution as well as hope. All agree that there will be a cure, but all equally agree that the pathway to a cure leads through control, which is dependent on the growth and utilization of knowledge about the disease.

Dr. Eugene P. Fendergrass, emeritus professor of radiology, University of Pennsylvania, ACS President in 1969, sees the battle against cancer much like that which was waged against polio. "Three viruses of polio were discovered from 1909 to 1939, but it was not until 1954 that a vaccine to counter all three viruses was proved effective."

The 1960 ACS President, Dr. Warren H. Cole, professor of surgery emeritus, University of Illinois College of Medicine, views the future of success in treating cancer as lying with development of drugs and antibodies specifically designed to cure or control certain types of cancer.

"There is little hope that even during the next century we will find a single drug capable of curing all types of cancer," Significant breakthroughs have been made in recent years, and scientists look to a variety of avenues as leading to control and/or cures, he said.

Dr. Thomas Carline, chairman of the Department of Radiology, Mason Clinic, Seattle, Wash., views progress toward a cure for cancer as frustrated by problems only humans can resolve. He does not look for any spectacular, breakthrough-type of cure and solution. Advances are being made on every front, with each element of new knowledge gained through research being applied in a pattern to the whole problem.

"Probably our greatest disappointment," says Dr. Carline, "lies in the fact that we seem unable to persuade people not to smoke and to recognize warning signals at an earlier time."

"Though the cause and cure of cancer continue to challenge our most sophisticated efforts, I am sure that, with our scientific know-how, economic strength and professional leadership, discoveries which have been made and those to come will mark the end of this dread disease."

At the root of the fact that cancer is a varied manifestation of abnormal cell growth lies the solution to the control of cancer, Dr. Wendell G.

Scott, professor of clinical radiology, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Mo., believes that "there will come a time when the basic underlying cause that converts a normal cell into a malignant cell will be understood." He adds that this will come "some years in the future."

In the meantime, Dr. Scott, like anyone becomes more optimistic about matters at hand. He agrees with his predecessors that it is doubtful that any single factor will develop and "put an end to all cancer in the immediate future."

But, he adds, "I do see many individual breakthroughs that will permit us to control a particular cancer long before the cause may be discovered."

He cites as an example of this already happening, measure to control cancer of the cervix. This type of cancer can now be controlled "al-

most 100 per cent" if a woman has a Pap-test once a year.

Dr. Scott adds that lung cancer is largely a controllable disease, "since 85-95 per cent of them are associated with excessive inhalation of cigarette smoke."

Perhaps it is most fitting that the most recent ex-president of the American Cancer Society should be the most directly optimistic about the cure for cancer. Dr. Ashbel

C. Williams, surgeon, of Jacksonville, Fla., was asked: How far in the future do you see the conquest of cancer? He answered, "I would say five to 25 years to be realized in graduated steps."

Cancer cure, or control? The ex-presidents of the ACS are agreed on what is probably the most important consideration: Cancer, whatever it is biologically, will be under control, very hopefully before the end of this century.

Such control will come through development of knowledge, application of this knowledge, its dissemination to those treating patients, and the application of known, effective preventive measures by John Q. Public.

(The second article in this series will report the reactions of doctors to the question, "During the past two decades what have been the most distinctive developments in the attack on cancer?")

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