

Physicians fight myths and problems of cancer

American Cancer Society volunteers are out to dispel much of the fog and fear surrounding cancer today. As part of the society's recent campaign, more than 30,000 volunteers from the metro-Detroit area canvassed neighborhoods, sharing information on cancer control and accepting contributions to support its research, education and services. During this campaign, two cancer specialists discussed causes of cancer, common misconceptions, profit and problems involved in treating cancer, progress in cancer treatment in metro-Detroit and the role of the ACS. They are Dr. Vainutis Vaitkevicius of Wayne State and Harper-Grace Hospital and Dr. Albert LoBuglio of the University of Michigan Medical Center. The following combined excerpts are from a recent interview with the two doctors.

By M.B. Dillon
staff writer

Unknowns continue to cloud medicine's understanding of cancer. What do we really know about the disease?

More than two million Americans have been cured of cancer — that means after at least five years, they're without evidence of the disease. One in four Americans now living will develop cancer. Every 75 seconds, an American dies of cancer — that's 1,150 deaths per day.

Cancer killed more school-age children last year than any other disease. It now strikes two out of three American families. One cancer patient in three is being saved — it was one in four a few years ago. Half of those who develop cancer this year — an estimated 402,298 people — could and should be saved.

Since 1946, the American Cancer Society has invested nearly half a billion dollars in cancer research. This year, it will donate \$45 million nationally and \$1.9 million to research institutions in Michigan.

Statistics show that lung cancer affects many smokers. What's being done to control this self-produced cancer?

"Self-produced cancer" is a most disconcerting concern. It's fair to say that whatever gains we're making in curing cancer, we're losing almost entirely because of the increasing incidence of lung cancer — self-produced cancer — especially in women. Although many types of cancer no longer are fatal due to medical advances, there is an absolutely frightening increase in the incidence of lung cancer in women that reflects the change in smoking habits from a number of years ago. It's important to look at things in the environment that may produce malignancy, but it's always easier to blame the other guy when in fact our own personal habits have much more striking impact. It's very clear that many individuals do not intend to change smoking habits no matter how clear it is that lung cancer is the one cancer we know how to prevent.

Is there anything we can do to change this attitude?

A huge stumbling block confronting cancer specialists is the inability to understand what motivates people to do one thing versus another. We could eliminate hundreds of thousands of deaths every year if we could change people's motivation. I think motivation research, unfortunately, is very unattractive to most people. It's difficult to convince medical students that time spent trying to prevent disease is worthwhile. It's much more

glamorous to cut somebody's extremity off and cure him of cancer.

Is treating cancer more profitable than curing it?

Medicine would like to shrug off the widespread misconception that it's more profitable to treat cancer than to cure it. That statement is plainly ridiculous for the simple reason that people working in cancer research and with

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Dr. Albert LoBuglio of the U-M Medical Center (left) and Dr. Vainutis Vaitkevicius of Harper-Grace Hospital recently talked about the problems facing the American Cancer Society in its quest to fight cancer.

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