



Killing the killer

BY WALTER ROBINSON

This year cancer will overtake heart disease as the number one cause of premature death in Canada.

Almost 150,000 Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer this year. Cancer will strike one in three people in their lifetime. Men and women, young and old, black and white, gay and straight, Muslim, Jew, Christian and atheist; cancer is an equal opportunity killer, it does not discriminate.

Cancer will claim 70,000 Canadian lives this year. That's 1,346 per week, 192 per day, 8 per hour or one death every seven-and-a-half-minutes.

5,200 people in Ottawa will be diagnosed with cancer this year for an average of 14 people a day, every day without exception. One of these people will be a friend, neighbour or family member. One of these people could be you.

Ladies, your most common diagnosis is breast cancer. Guys, it's prostate cancer.

These two cancers along with lung cancer – go ahead fool, have another cigarette – and colorectal cancer will account for 52% of all new cancer diagnoses in Ottawa in 2005. These are discouraging statistics.

But there is hope. It is found in the halls of the Ottawa Hospital Regional Cancer Centre where a 400-strong team of doctors, surgeons, oncology nurses, radiation technicians, and researchers will give 5,200 new cancer patients (plus 14,000 returning patients) their best chance at making a full recovery.

Great Strides

Great strides have been made in the last two decades. Today, three out of four children diagnosed with cancer will survive and thrive. And 1 out of every 2 adults will also make a full recovery. But these odds aren't good enough, they must be improved.

This is why it is so important to give generously during the 8th annual Cancer Centre telephone tomorrow. It

will be broadcast live from St. Laurent shopping centre on the New RO from noon to 7 p.m. Organizers are hoping to surpass last year's donation record of \$1.8 million.

Long-time *Sun* readers will know that I serve on the Cancer Centre Foundation board. Yes, I'm biased. I lost my father to a malignant brain tumour on December 4, 1996. From the time of his tumour-induced stroke to surgery to radiation to death, it was just over two months. He was 66. For me, killing the killer is personal.

Every dollar raised tomorrow stays right here in our community. It will purchase new chemotherapy chairs, replace dated radiation therapy equipment and fund groundbreaking research. Research that moves from the lab bench to the bedside as fast as possible.

Your past donations allow the foundation to seed fund the oncolytic virus research (using common viruses to kill cancer cells) of doctors Bell and Atkins in the late 1990s. This initial \$25,000 grant has grown into a multi-million dollar national research endeavour attracting funds from research-based pharmaceutical giants and various government funding agencies. Preliminary results in the lab dish are promising; the viruses are killing off different cancer cells over 50% of the time.

Your donations fund promising molecular research. A cancer centre research team is hoping to develop better markers for prostate, colorectal, breast and ovarian cancer tests. The PSA test for prostate cancer and the CEA test for colorectal cancer are not perfect. These tests can yield false positives or false negatives. Their work so far gives rise to the real possibility that new and better tests may be developed.

Today, almost 7% of our patients are in clinical trials on new medicines and therapies. This is a huge jump from 3.5% just two years ago. North America's best cancer clinics – Sloan-Kettering in New York, Dana Farber at Harvard, MD Anderson in Houston and Princess Margaret in Toronto – average 10% of their patients in clinical trials. Our cancer centre is rapidly climbing into this elite group of "world class" facilities.

Continent-wide, the difference between good and great health care facilities is largely determined by community support.

Strike Back At Cancer

Ottawans can be proud of their Herculean contributions to international relief organizations in response to the tsunami tragedy in Southeast Asia. Tomorrow's challenge is turning our attention to the pressing need to strike back at cancer here at home.

Over 650 patients will visit the cancer centre on Monday. Almost 300 will receive radiation therapy. Another 120 to 150 will receive chemotherapy. Please support them with a pledge during tomorrow's telethon. The numbers are 746-7730 or 1-866-545-6506.