

Statements from the President's Cancer Panel Meeting

Improving Cancer Care for All: Real People, Real Problems
September 14-15, 2000

"Why don't all Americans get the best available cancer care?"

The President's Cancer Panel met with patients, survivors, family members, and caregivers September 14th and 15th at the University of Vermont School of Medicine's Vermont Cancer Center in Burlington. State health officials and health care providers also testified during two days of presentations and a two-hour town hall meeting broadcast live by Vermont Public Radio.

Speakers identified barriers that prevent equal access to the best available cancer care, including geography, economics, education, culture, attitude, and politics. Cancer care often is not available for uninsured or under-insured patients, nor is it available in rural communities, necessitating expensive and disruptive travel to cancer centers. Patients, family members, and even primary care physicians often lack the information they need to select the most appropriate treatment plan, and the policies of health care organizations often make even basic care unaffordable. One cancer survivor said, "When you are fighting for your life, it is almost more than you can do to fight the system." A speaker who provides outreach and education services for underserved African American women stated that "changing behaviors and attitudes has no value if we do not have services in place to support those changes."

"The circle of poverty is not a closed circle," said Dr. Freeman as he listened to the financial hardships created by health care costs for the working poor and underinsured. Difficulties are faced even by educated, middle-class--and thus relatively empowered--Americans. How much worse is the situation for Americans who lack the financial resources, emotional support, and fighting spirit necessary to navigate the health care system?

The occasion was the second in a series of seven regional Panel meetings intended to explore why proven cancer prevention and treatment interventions are not equally benefiting all Americans. Testimony at the meeting contained graphic evidence of what Dr. Harold Freeman, Chair of the Panel, calls a "disconnect" between cancer research discoveries and delivery of the knowledge gained through research.

The testimony from this meeting will be incorporated, along with information provided to the Panel during six other regional meetings and a meeting with an international focus, into a report to the President of the United States in the fall of 2001. This report will contain the Panel's conclusions and recommendations for actions that will reduce barriers to the equal application of research results for all Americans.

The President's Cancer Panel is an advisory group established by Congress to monitor the Nation's efforts to reduce the burden of cancer. The Panel reports directly to the President annually on delays or blockages in that effort. For more information, visit the Panel's web site at <http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/ADVISORY/pcp/pcp.htm>, call 301-451-9399, or e-mail to pcp-r@mail.nih.gov.