

From the office of

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OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS

NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE

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Cancer: Is there any American who does not fear that some day their doctor will say, "You have Cancer"?

Is there any American who has not imagined that a stomach ache, a persistent cold, a sore that would not heal meant that their child, their parent, their spouse had cancer?

Is there any disease known to 20th century man which arouses more anxiety or causes more pain and suffering?

The answers to all these questions, I am confident, is a no. Cancer is a disease that invites melodrama. It is a disease about which it is hard to exaggerate.

Among the proudest achievements during my decade as Chairman of the Health Subcommittee is the 1971 National Cancer Act, which started the "War on Cancer". Today, we will hear of the impressive advancements that have been made over the years in this valiant effort. In the 1950's only 30 percent of cancers were curable. By 1977 that percentage rose to 41 percent, and by 1980, 45 percent of serious cancers were treatable.

Along the way, we have learned much about the problems of cancer. We now know, for example, that up to 80 percent of all cancers are associated with environmental causes. This discovery presents difficult problems that affect our lifestyles, our workplaces, our health care system. Fighting cancer is more than just discovery of a "magic bullet"; it is coming to grips with all the social and economic causes and consequences of cancer.

I have been particularly concerned about the critical problem of transferring our new-found scientific knowledge into tools for our doctors in the communities. As we carry forth important biomedical research, we must not lose sight of the ultimate goal of our research efforts --- The prevention and cure of cancer for the greatest number possible.

Our progress has been impressive. But much remains to be done.

Those of us who helped to initiate the national cancer program nine years ago -- and I am proud to count myself among them -- never expected quick answers or painless victories. We were, and are, in this battle for the long haul.

I think the American people understand and support this point of view. I think I speak for them in pledging my efforts to ensure that support for the fight against cancer does not rise and fall according to medical fashion or the vagaries of our economy. At the same time, however, I am also confident that the American people expect from the Congress and our research administrators competent, open-minded and innovative management. We aim to make sure that in this critical research area they get what they want and deserve.

As we plunge into the details of policy and program at the National Cancer Institute, we must not lose sight of an essential fact. Cancer is not an abstraction, but a disease that affects people, and there is much we can learn about the disease from its victims. In reviewing the progress of the cancer program to date, and planning its future programs, we need to keep in mind who gets cancer, with what frequency and with what consequences for their health, their quality of life, and their ability to function as income-earners, family members and citizens. I think we will find that we gain unexpected and important information from this focus on the human dimensions of this feared disease.

That's why I am particularly pleased that Senator Hawkins has chosen to open the Investigations Subcommittee's work with this important topic. I offer her and all those who have dedicated themselves to the fight against cancer my full cooperation and support.

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