

Cancer War Chief Warns of Fund Cuts

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DR. FRANK J. RAUSCHER
... 19 programs affected

The chief of President Nixon's war on cancer has warned the White House in a secret memo that the present cancer budget will not allow him to follow research leads that could save thousands of lives.

Dr. Frank J. Rauscher, picked by the President to run the war on cancer that Mr. Nixon personally declared, told the White House's Office of Management and Budget that he needs at least \$640 million in the 1974 fiscal year that started July 1 "to carry out the objectives the executive and members of Congress have often enunciated."

Instead, the President approved \$500 million for the National Cancer Institute in his 1974 budget.

In the memo, Rauscher detailed 19 key programs that would be eliminated or curtailed by the budget cuts. Included were programs that could have immediate value to cancer patients, such as moving the latest advance in drug treatments and immunotherapy from the research lab to the bedside.

The memo is one in a series of documents uncovered by investigators from the General Accounting Office and the Library of Congress's Congressional Research Service who

are looking into the impact of cuts in the federal health budget.

The investigation was requested by Sen. Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wash.), chairman of the Senate Labor, Health, Education, and Welfare Appropriations Subcommittee, and Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), the Senate majority leader. Mansfield and Magnuson plan to release the memos at a press conference next week when the appropriations subcommittee staff has had a chance to analyze them.

Rauscher's memo, highlighting "the deleterious effects on the 1974 National Cancer Program" from the budget cuts, is

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so clear that it needs no complicated analysis.

Reducing the budget, Rauscher said, would restrict the beginnings of clinical trials into the hottest new area of cancer treatment—the use of the body's own immune system to overcome the killing tumors.

"Immunodiagnosis and immunotherapy," Rauscher wrote, "offer the most immediate promising results in the early detection and treatment of major cancers."

Moreover, he told OMB, the flow of new cancer drugs into the hands of doctors will be stifled by the budget cuts. Combinations of four or five drugs have produced "good to excellent results" in the treatment of 15 types of cancer.

Under the President's budget "we would have to delay the testing of new clinical antitumor agents in man," Rauscher said.

"Instead of introducing 8 to 10 new antitumor agents into general medical practice, at best we could introduce only 5 or 6."

Tests of combined treatments of drugs, radiotherapy, surgery and immunotherapy on some of the greatest cancer killers—including gastrointestinal cancer and cancer of the prostate and cervix—"will be delayed," Rauscher said.

An estimated 97,000 Americans die yearly from cancer of the gastrointestinal tract.

Prostate cancer kills 17,800 men a year and cancer of the cervix kills 12,000 women a year.

"More than 12,000 women die needlessly of cervical cancer," Rauscher wrote, "because no more than 25 per cent (of the women who run the great risk) get Pap tests. Industrial contracts to develop equipment to automate the cytological screening of Pap tests would have to be postponed for at least a year."

Clinical trials in new treatments for breast cancer—the leading cause of death of women in the prime of life—will also be curtailed by the budget cuts. These treatments consist of combining drugs with either radiation or surgery.

Lung cancer, the biggest cancer killer of men, is expected to increase 52 per cent by the year 2000 "largely due to cigaret smoking," Rauscher wrote.

"As one answer to this problem, industrial firms have been cooperating with the National Cancer Institute to develop a less hazardous cigaret. These efforts could not be expanded in 1974 and some would have to be cut back or terminated."

Moreover, the lung cancer detection and diagnosis work in the cancer control program will be cut in half along with delays in the training and education of doctors in the latest cancer treatments and the establishment of a rehabilitation

program for cancer patients.

The program to find viruses that may cause cancer will be cut back, along with an effort to find out which of the 5,000 new chemicals introduced into the environment each year cause cancer.

"While we should be increasing the number of agents screened each year, the number of new agents screened in fiscal year 1974 will have to be reduced by 25 per cent," Rauscher wrote.

When he proposed a bill for his "cancer cure program" in 1971, President Nixon promised to take personal charge of the war against cancer and said:

"The time has now come for us to put our money where our hopes are . . . As far as the cure is concerned and as far as the time when it is found, it will not fail because of lack of money . . . To the extent that money is needed, it will be provided."

Six months later, when the President signed a much-revised National Cancer Act as "a wonderful Christmas present" to the nation, he said the law would "place the full weight of the presidency behind the national program.

"I can say with the greatest confidence," he continued, "that there will be no uncertainty about the government's role in this effort. I am determined that the federal will and federal resources will be

committed as effectively as possible to the campaign against cancer and that nothing will be allowed to compromise that commitment."

Nevertheless, the government did not spend \$58.9 million during the last fiscal year that had been appropriated for cancer.

While the President requested \$500 million for the war on cancer in fiscal 1974, the appropriation passed by the House approved \$522 million. The Senate Appropriations Committee has not yet voted on the bill, but indications are that it will as high or higher than the House version.

If it is, Melvin R. Laird, the President's chief domestic adviser, said he would recommend a presidential veto.