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Cancer Control Month, 1987

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

In the 50 years since President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the National Cancer Institute Act, on August 5, 1937, our Nation has taken giant steps toward the conquest of cancer. Unparalleled growth in our understanding of the biology of cancer has changed what we can do to detect, diagnose, and treat this disease, and has made cancer prevention an attainable goal. These achievements should be a source of immense pride to scientists and to the American public, and should help us rededicate ourselves to the control of this disease.

It is sobering to realize that strong, scientific evidence links many forms of cancer to the way we live, especially the foods we eat and the use of tobacco. We know, for example, that smoking causes 30 percent of all cancer deaths. Just as important, though, we know that quitting smoking, even after many years, can reduce the risk of cancer. For two years now, we have seen a decreasing incidence of lung cancer among white males, and it looks as if the rate for white females is moving in the same direction. This encouraging downward trend reflects gradual changes in smoking patterns over the past two decades. Unfortunately, however, black Americans are still experiencing high rates of smoking-related cancers. More needs to be done to educate groups with high incidence of cancer about the dangers of smoking. We also must do everything we can to urge our young people not to start smoking.

The estimate that 35 percent of the cancer deaths in this country are related to diet means that dietary changes can make a big difference. Fortunately, the changes we need to make are simple—cutting fat consumption down from our current average of nearly 40 percent of total calories to 30 percent or less, and doubling our daily consumption of fiber from fruits, vegetables, and wholegrain products.

Scientists have known for many years that the chances of recovering from cancer are best when the disease is found and treated at an early stage. Everyone should learn the warning signs of cancer and have symptoms checked by a physician without delay. Moreover, some types of cancer can be detected even before they cause symptoms. All adults should ask their doctors about special tests and examinations that can detect early cancer. As examples, women should ask about the value of regular mammography and Pap smears to detect breast and cervical cancers.

Because 24 percent of all cancers affect people under the age of 55, we are encouraged by the declining cancer death rate among Americans in that age group. Another noteworthy trend is the decrease in the death rates from colon cancer, a disease that mainly affects older people.

In 1938, the Congress of the United States passed a joint resolution (52 Stat. 148; 36 U.S.C. 150) requesting the President to issue an annual proclamation declaring April to be Cancer Control Month.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the month of April 1987 as Cancer Control Month. I invite the Governors of the fifty States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the appropriate officials of all other areas under the United States flag, to issue similar proclamations. I also ask the health care professionals, communications industry, food industry, community groups, women's organizations, and all other interested persons and groups to unite during this month to reaffirm publicly our Nation's continuing commitment to control cancer.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-first day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and eleventh.

Ronald Reagan