



\$30 billion 'War on Cancer' a bust?

USA Today , May 29, 1997, p. A1

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After 26 years of research and \$30 billion in spending, the federal government's "War on Cancer" has failed to reduce death rates, concludes a study by University of Chicago researchers.

- Since 1970 the cancer death rate has grown by 6 percent -- from 189.6 deaths per 100,000 people to 200.9.
- Since 1990 government spending on cancer research increased from \$1.6 billion a year to \$2.25 billion in 1996.
- Overall cancer mortality among people older than 55 increased by 15 percent to 20 percent, which was somewhat offset by a 25 percent drop in deaths among people younger than 25.

The latest study is an update by researchers John Bailar and Heather Gornick of a 1986 Bailar report covering 1950 to 1982. That report caused a furor by concluding that, "Some 35 years of intense effort focused largely on improving treatment must be judged a qualified failure."

Now, he writes, "with 12 more years of data and experience, we see little reason to change that conclusion." He says that money spent on new treatments "certainly hasn't paid off" and he "can't see whether it will ever pay off."

He would shift funds from cancer research to cancer prevention -- such as campaigns against smoking and for people to adopt healthier lifestyles. Skeptics, however, point to a myriad of such government exhortations which have had questionable results.