Is There A Cancer Epidemic in the United States?

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This report was originally written by Alan C. Fisher, Dr.P.H., and Wendy Worth, Ph.D. It was revised by Debra A. Mayer, M.P.H., a Research Associate in Epidemiology at the American Council on Science and Health.

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The media and many advocacy groups would have the American public believe that the U.S. is in the midst of a cancer "epidemic." These groups perpetuate the myth that there has been a sudden surge in new cancer cases and deaths and that unknown environmental agents are the cause. The purpose of this American Council on Science and Health report is to provide current cancer statistics and detail the proven causes of cancer. A careful review of the facts reveals:

- With a few exceptions, primarily lung and AIDS-related cancers, there has been little overall increase in the number of new cases of cancer reported or the number of cancer deaths over the last 40 years.

- The number of deaths caused by many forms of cancer has actually decreased, including deaths from Hodgkin's disease and cancers of the cervix, uterus (endometrium), stomach, rectum, testis, bladder and thyroid.

- Modern screening methods, such as mammography for breast cancer and the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test for prostate cancer, create the appearance of a sudden increase in new cancer cases. There is no correspondingly large increase in mortality from these forms of cancer, indicating that we are finding more previously undetected malignancies.

- Most cancers are related to known lifestyle factors. Among the proven causes of cancer are: tobacco, diet, alcohol, radiation, certain sexually transmitted diseases or reproductive patterns and sunlight. Current research indicates that some individuals may also have a genetic predisposition for certain forms of cancer.

- "Chemicals" in food and the environment do not have a significant impact on overall cancer risk in the U.S.

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