

Cancer the focus of area woman's White House vigil

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Patti Stiewing has a reminder for President Clinton — it's been 26 years since another president declared a war on cancer and 14 million people have died.

Today, on the anniversary of President Nixon's "Christmas present to the nation" announcement of a war against cancer, Ms. Stiewing will hold a vigil in front of the White House.

"We have a cure for cancer. It is not in the Amazon somewhere. It is not some magic bullet, a pill or a potion," the Davidsonville woman said. "It lies in the hearts of people willing to commit."

For the most part, Ms. Stiewing will be alone — and most likely cold. She started at 7 a.m. and will not leave until 9 p.m. But in her personal crusade against the disease, there is no surrender.

"I've been at this for 17 years. It is such a dreadful disease that it just freezes people in their place and they feel like they can't act," said Ms. Stiewing, 43. "I want to show them they can make a commitment and they can act on that. I want them to see that they have the power. If I can be out there for 14 hours, they can do it, too."

In 1981, her 4-year-old daughter, Amber, died of cancer, which stemmed from a bulbous tumor that took over her child's neck.

Since then, she has written a book about Amber titled "Embrace an Angel" and has fought to raise awareness of the need for research and prevention, starting Amber's Alliance Foundation.

Now she is determined to make cancer the country's No. 1 priority which deserves attention from the highest office.

"He is the leader of our nation. It is his role to take the lead in this. We have a nation which is interested in cancer but not committed to it," she said.

Her mandate for Mr. Clinton includes:

■ Double the \$2 billion budget for the National Cancer Institute with the money to be used for education, research and preventive measures.

■ Appoint an unbiased task force to investigate the war on cancer, the state of cancer and its affect on the nation.

■ Investigate all cancer therapies from around the world regardless of political considerations.

■ End the "War on Cancer" and begin a "Campaign of Commitment" to saving lives through cooperation, prevention, research and positive action.

"Things are so disorganized right now between public and private institutions. We need to focus our energy together toward prevention," she said.

"We know that chemicals cause cancer and we know how to prevent it. We need to reduce chemicals and boost our immune system."

Ms. Stiewing will be joined a times by friends, supporters and people with cancer, including Annapolis activist Larry Griffith.

"He is a wonderful person fighting a very brave battle," Ms. Stiewing said.

For more information on Amber's Alliance Foundation, which is based in Annapolis, call (410) 295-6551.