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Demonstration Planned on Cancer War Anniversary  
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by Peter Barry Chowka

There will be little public notice, or celebration, of an anniversary that occurs on December 23, 1997 -- the 26th year since legislation that created the unprecedented multi-billion dollar government-private sector alliance known as the War on Cancer was signed by President Nixon in 1971 (six months before the Watergate break-in). Last year's silver anniversary, despite the media's fascination with dates, passed almost totally without acknowledgement (see Natural Healthline December 15, 1996).

This year, at least one person, Patti Stiewing, 44, intends to not let the date slip by in silence. On December 23, 1997, Patti, who lives in Annapolis, Maryland, plans a fourteen hour demonstration-vigil outside of the White House -- "one hour," she writes, "for each of the over fourteen million Americans who have died since Nixon declared the War on Cancer." Her purposes include highlighting the failure of the cancer war to actually help most people with the disease and to call for new strategies that reflect the value of freedom of information and choice, complementary alternative approaches, and truly putting patients first.

On October 30, 1980, Patti's young daughter Amber died of cancer after a short but painful struggle and the efforts of her parents to save her life that included problematic conventional treatments and a frustrating search for alternatives. Seventeen years to the day later, Patti launched Amber's Alliance Foundation, a nonprofit tax exempt 501(c)(3) advocacy organization with a number of goals, including:

- \*to raise awareness of the issue of cancer
- \*to assess the knowledge and the needs of the public and to speak on their behalf
- \*to provide unbiased information in easy-to-understand language
- \*to mediate an agreeable solution to the growing conflict within the "cancer community" for the benefit of all mankind.

As the Amber's Alliance Foundation Web site notes, "The time has come to end the 26 year 'War on Cancer' and begin a 'Campaign of Commitment' to sav[e] lives through cooperation, prevention, research, and action with no regard for politics or profit. We believe," the site continues, "that the number of people getting cancer has increased dramatically. . . You have a right to all of the options in cancer treatment -- whether conventional, alternative, or complementary -- and that, once given the unbiased information in easy-to-understand language, you have the ability to make an intelligent choice as to which therapy or therapies are best for you and your loved ones. Our focus should be taken off of the numbers, statistics, percentages, and ratios and put back on the people whose lives have been devastated by the cancer epidemic."

Two days before Christmas, as the nation is preoccupied with the final preparations for the holidays, Patti promises outside of the White House "Nothing nutty, loud, or angry; just a vigil with a sign and some brochures."