

author of *The Cancer Syndrome* and other provocative works on the politics and economics of cancer and alternative therapies, writes about mammography. Citing several studies (c. 1993), Moss notes, "for women over 50 or at high risk, benefits [of mammography] far outweigh risks. However, for the average woman in her forties, the study's findings, together with other evidence, seem to argue against routine mammograms." Studies from the 1970s, and a handful of critics more recently, contend that mammography is actually deleterious and can cause more cases of cancer than it detects.

The issue of the value of "early detection" overall remains controversial. For instance, it has been noted by several authorities that simply by "detecting" cancer earlier than it might have been discovered in previous generations, it can be made to appear -- falsely -- that a person with cancer is living longer, when that might not be the case at all.

One person who did take public note of the ignominious Cancer War anniversary was Patti Stiewing (see NHL 12.21.97), an advocate of a reappraisal of the country's anti-cancer effort via her non-profit organization Amber's Alliance. On December 23, Stiewing demonstrated in front of the White House for 14 hours. Excerpts from her e-mail report to me about her action follow.

"Many people from throughout the world come to the doorstep of the White House. Most of the tourists (foreigners) were astounded at me and my sign, and the news that it was the 26th anniversary of the War on Cancer, that so many people had died and continue to die, that our government did not recognize that day. Quite a lot of them took pictures and videos of me, and even asked me to pose with them! I was amazed. They were so concerned and respectful.

"Some friends came by in shifts, brought food and hot coffee, stayed with me, and even carried my sign! Park police as well as the Secret Service were excellent. Got to know them all by first names. Had some good press: AP Radio called me on my cell phone and we did a live broadcast at 7:20. The story went over the wires and NBC picked it up. Univision TV did some filming.

"The apathy that so many in the 'cancer community' feel is prevalent in Americans regarding cancer -- as Vera Green put it so aptly the night before the vigil, "Apathy is just frozen fear." People are so scared, Peter. Because I was at the White House out of love, concern, caring, and compassion, I was open and softened and willing to accept whatever the truth was [on the part] of the people who appeared. I saw it in their eyes for 14 hours! You can see the terror in their eyes. Many, many people came up to me to talk about this issue. My heart goes out to the American people. The experience changed my whole attitude. People are not running, hiding, and ignoring this issue, they are truly living in fear -- almost like refugees in a war zone.

"I need to work on spreading the word in '98. Most people were truly surprised at the fact that this was the '26th anniversary.' They don't know much about the realities of cancer, only what they hear. But if we concentrate on upbeat, positive presentations -- a series of events, a speaking tour, talk show gigs, or a symposium -- I think that people will respond. Actually, I know it!"

For more information,

Radio Address of the President to the Nation December 27, 1997 on Medicare and Cancer Screening
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/html/1997-12-27.html>

Amber's Alliance