



A PATIENT-CENTERED FORUM OF NATIONAL ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES IN CANCER

February 21, 2002

The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator _____ :

The undersigned organizations, representing cancer patients, providers and researchers, strongly support the Access to Cancer Therapies Act (S. 913) and urge its passage during this session of Congress. This legislation, which would expand Medicare coverage to all oral cancer drugs, is necessary if quality cancer care is to be maintained for beneficiaries. At present, most cancer drug therapy is covered by Medicare because the drugs are administered through injection by providers. Increasingly, however, cancer treatment will be shifting from provider administration of injectable drugs to new oral drugs that can be administered in the convenience of the patient's home. These new oral drugs are not only less toxic than current treatments but also more effective and possibly more cost-effective as well. But these advances will give senior citizens no benefit if they are not accessible because of shortfalls in Medicare coverage.

Last year saw the approval of a new oral drug for chronic myelogenous leukemia that has greatly improved quality of life and disease control for patients with this rare but deadly blood cancer, and this year the same drug has been approved for a gastrointestinal cancer that had been virtually untreatable. Approval of a new oral drug representing a significant treatment advance for lung cancer is also expected this year. In the near future these new products will be available to treat breast, colon, pancreas and prostate cancers as well. None of these life-extending drugs will be covered by Medicare absent legislation, and existing important drugs like tamoxifen for breast cancer will continue to remain not covered.

We think it is important to note the following:

- S. 913 is supported not only by the Cancer Leadership Council, with its 29 national advocacy groups, but also by 20 national groups dedicated to quality health care for senior citizens.
- Co-sponsors of the legislation include more than 30 Senators, more than half of all the Members of the House of Representatives, and more than half of the membership of the Ways & Means Committee.

- While we all support a comprehensive Medicare drug benefit, we are concerned that the chances for adoption and implementation of such comprehensive relief is likely to be delayed, and the need for cancer patients can be met immediately under Part B (extending the limited coverage of oral cancer drugs that already exists for drugs with an injectable counterpart).
- The projected cost of S. 913 is modest (\$2.8 billion over 5 years) compared with the total cost of comprehensive drug coverage and would represent a down payment on an eventual larger benefit.

Even if it were enacted this year, its implementation would not be felt for years. Rather than waiting for the opportunity to provide a comprehensive and complete solution, we believe the Congress should take a meaningful, constructive and immediate step toward that goal by enacting S. 913.

If you have already joined as a co-sponsor, we thank you, and, if you have not, we urge you to do so without further delay. This legislation is much needed by beneficiaries with cancer, and your help will be much appreciated.

Cancer Leadership Council

Alliance for Lung Cancer Advocacy,
Support, and Education
American Cancer Society
American Society of Clinical Oncology
Association of American Cancer Institutes
Cancer Care, Inc.
Cancer Research Foundation of America
The Children's Cause, Inc.
Coalition of National Cancer Cooperative
Groups
Colorectal Cancer Network
Foundation for the Children's Oncology
Group
Kidney Cancer Association
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

Lymphoma Research Foundation
Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation
National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship
National Patient Advocate Foundation
National Prostate Cancer Coalition
North American Brain Tumor Coalition
Oncology Nursing Society
Ovarian Cancer National Alliance
Pancreatic Cancer Action Network
The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer
Foundation
US TOO! International, Inc.
The Wellness Community