

## The National Cancer Act—The First Five Years

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Cancer, in its various forms, is one of society's most dread diseases.

It has long occupied the attention of many workers in the biomedical field. Their efforts at finding a cause, preventing or curing the disease have been generously supported over the past several decades by both public and private funds.

In 1970 a group of knowledgeable consultants representing many different scientific fields was convened at the request of the federal government, to determine whether or not our present understanding of the abnormal biological processes involved in cancer was sufficiently well developed to justify mounting a national broad scale attack on the disease. The concensus of this meeting was that such an effort was warranted.

Not everyone shared this point of view, but a nation and a Congress still euphoric over man's successful landing on the moon (July 20, 1969) were not to be denied and, on December 23, 1971, the President signed into law the National Cancer Act.

Two of the mandates contained in this legislation were that the National Cancer Institute would become the federal agency responsible for implementing the law and that the National Cancer Institute would recognize, as soon as feasible, a number of qualified institutions as Comprehensive Cancer Centers.

Simply stated, the "Centers" were to be places long noted for high quality cancer research, education and patient care and committed to the concept of bringing new information regarding cancer from the "laboratory bench" to the bedside as quickly as prudently possible.

The Yale University School of Medicine and the Yale-New Haven Hospital, having been engaged in cancer research and the care of cancer patients for many years, applied for and succeeded in gaining recognition as one of the nation's then 17 Comprehensive Cancer Centers. This designation has, of course, brought with it new problems as well as opportunities.

It has required setting up a new administrative organization. The Center's activities have crossed conventional academic boundaries, new personnel has been recruited to strengthen certain areas where the activities were weak, community outreach programs have had to be devised and a host of other problems, some yet unseen, have had to be faced and resolved.

However, there was a bright side to it all and it was the prospect of obtaining funds from NCI for new construction to accommodate the expansion in cancer activities.

One of the long standing requisites for procuring such funds is for the applicant to raise a percentage of the total cost of construction in so-called "matching funds." To this end a group of dedicated leaders from within and outside the Yale-New Haven Medical Center and Yale University succeeded in gaining the support of the Connecticut State Assembly in this new venture in the amount of \$1.2 million and with Yale University's commitment of \$1.7 million and NCI's grant of \$4.2 million, the funds



Representatives of federal, state and local government and Yale University and Yale-New Haven Hospital assembled to commemorate construction starting on the new Comprehensive Cancer Center for Connecticut at Yale. *From left to right*, Kingman Brewster, Jr., President of Yale University; Frank Logue, Mayor of the City of New Haven; the Honorable Ella T. Grasso, Governor of the State of Connecticut; Benno Schmidt, Esq., Chairman of the President's Cancer Panel; Jack W. Cole, M.D., Director of the Comprehensive Cancer Center for Connecticut at Yale; and Lawrence K. Pickett, M.D., Chief-of-Staff, Yale-New Haven Hospital.

were in hand to proceed with a new and much needed cancer facility.

On October 7, 1976, a day-long symposium was held to mark the beginning of this new construction and to bear witness to the unique collaborative effort between the Yale-New Haven Medical Center, Yale University and the State of Connecticut in this undertaking.

It also provided an opportunity to re-examine the original tenets contained in the National Cancer Act on the occasion of its fifth anniversary.

The National Cancer Act will come before the 95th Congress for renewal during the Fall of 1977. Hard questions can be expected from many different quarters as to whether the public expectations have been or are being met.

The invited speakers have all been close to this issue over the past five years and will be influential in plotting the future course of this piece of health legislation.

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