

By Daniel S. Greenberg and Judith E. Randal

WHILE EVIDENCE accumulates that the vast majority of cancers are environmental in origin, the government's \$815 million-a-year "War on Cancer" is dominated by an outdated strategy aimed at cures rather than prevention.

The origins of this misperception lie in a little-known and complex relationship between the government's National Cancer Institute (NCI) — the "Pentagon" of the War on Cancer — and the private but powerful American Cancer Society (ACS), which, among other things, serves as NCI's ministry of information for educating the public about cancer. One effect of their collaboration is the dominance of the curative strategy, which is akin to dealing with aviation disasters mainly by seeking to reconstruct wrecks rather than to prevent them.

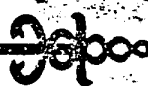
Under scientific and public pressure, NCI has been shifting additional resources to research into the origins and prevention of cancer, but the movement has been slow and the sums involved are relatively small. Though NCI officials have publicly stated that environmental sources account for as much as 90 per cent of all cancers — other estimates vary from 50 per cent upward — about 15 per cent of NCI's funds are in the environmental category. Privately, many NCI staff members express doubt that the actual sum is that high. Last year, Dr. Umberto Saffroff, who was then the associate director for carcinogenesis, wrote a long memorandum to Dr. Frank J. Rauscher, then director of NCI, complaining that he was hamstringing by insufficient staff and resources. Saffroff then quit the post for another at the agency.

While there is no question about the humane intent of all involved, questions do arise about the domination of ACS by a particular school of thought on what the priorities should be in the quest to control cancer. The ACS, many of whose directors have ties with major industries, places the emphasis on diagnosis and cures, rather than prevention. Its strong campaign against cigarettes is a major exception, and there are a few others, though of a significantly smaller scale. But in the main, ACS has shown little interest in the environmental origins of cancer, many of which are in industrial processes and products.

Asked about this specifically, Irving J. Rimer, ACS vice president for public information, said that the society has "a very grave concern about looking for the environmental causes of cancer" and has long supported both the population studies of its own epidemiologist, Dr. Cuyler Hammond, and the occupational cancer investigations of Dr. Irving J. Schellkopf of New York's Mt. Sinai Hospital, with whom Hammond often collaborates. A check confirmed Hammond's long association with

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WAGGING THE WARRIOR CANCER



How the American Cancer Society Focuses on Search for Cures Rather Than on the Environmental Causes

Schellkopf. But only 10 to 15 per cent of what Schellkopf and his colleagues have been spending in recent years has been contributed by the Cancer Society. The rest has come from several federal agencies, although not NCI.

ACS influence over NCI's strategy and spending has been effected through the society's representation on the major advisory bodies that guide the institute's programs. The influence is extensive and is typified by a vast program that some cancer specialists consider one of the major medical scandals of all time: the joint NCI-ACS breast cancer screening project. Against the advice of many of its own staff and advisory experts, NCI was persuaded by ACS to pay for more than four-fifths of this \$4 million undertaking, the X-ray portion of which has since been deemed possibly worthless as well as dangerous to many of the 280,000 women who were drawn in for examinations.

Since X-rays are a two-edged tool — they can trigger as well as fend off cancer — NCI has repeatedly been advised to scale down and even terminate indiscriminate

is a slightly increased risk of her getting the disease in the distant future (as a result of X-ray exposure), there's also an excellent chance that by that time science will have learned to control the disease."

The Digest failed to note that X-rays actually have a mixed record for detecting cancer, that unintrusive and harmless techniques, such as physical examination, will often suffice and that any foreseeable "control" of breast cancer is likely to involve disfiguring surgery and harsh drugs. Nor was it mentioned that the author interviewer of the article, Walter S. Ross, is a part-time employee of the ACS, which initiated and oversees the X-ray screening program.

A Self-Limited Role

TO ITS CREDIT, the ACS has led the campaign against cigarettes and recently has alerted the public and health officials to the carcinogenic dangers of asbestos and vinyl chloride gas, although most of the asbestos and vinyl chloride research has been financed by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, a sister agency of NCI in the National Institutes of Health complex. But apart from these and several minor ventures into the environmental control of cancer, ACS has had the effect of diverting attention from industry.

For example, when a government-produced "cancer atlas" showed that the disease tends to be most prevalent in heavily industrialized areas — with New Jersey cited as the most cancer-ridden — Lawrence Garfinkel, the ACS assistant vice president for epidemiology and statistics, was quoted in Medical World News as saying that "the people in the [New Jersey] State Health Department are promulgating an aura of cancer phobia to get money for studies."

Questioned about the accuracy of the quotation, Garfinkel said: "I was misquoted. What I did say was that if I were in the health department and wanted to get something started, I might even do the same thing." He added: "I believe we can save more lives in 1977 by getting people to stop smoking than by a stepped-up anti-industrial campaign."

ACS's widely publicized "Seven Warning Signs of Cancer" are not supplemented by warnings about industrial smogstacks or cautions about products other than cigarettes.

In the long and bitter struggle for passage of the Toxic Substances Control Act, a landmark law aimed at eliminating hazardous chemicals, particularly carcinogens, from the environment, the ACS was a late and perfunctory supporter.

ACS did not testify on the legislation, and its letter urging President Ford to approve the bill arrived so close to the scheduled signing ceremony that it may have gone unnoticed. According to a top labor official, "It took a gigantic effort" to get ACS to send the letter.

The society played no role in the decision by the Consumer Product Safety Commission to ban the flame retardant Tris from children's sleepwear because it has been shown to be a carcinogen in animals, according to officials at the commission and scientists at the Environmental Defense Fund, which goaded the commission into ordering the ban.

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In its public education campaigns and choice of the scientific research for which it provides financial support, the ACS has shown scant interest in the carcinogenic effects of air and water pollution, drugs and food additives. Its look-the-other-way attitude closely resembles that of the drug and chemical industries, with which many of its directors — all unpaid volunteers — are directly or indirectly associated.

Blaming the Victim

A CS LITERATURE intended for the public is virtually devoid of advice or information concerning the causation and prevention of cancer, apart from strictures against smoking and excessive sun exposure.

Though vast amounts of information have been accumulated about environmental origins of cancer, the ACS continues to emphasize the mysteries and to play on a blame-the-victim theme. Thus, in a widely distributed pamphlet, "Answering Your Questions About Cancer," the question is asked, "Why does cancer start?" The answer: "No one knows. In fact, the basic causes for most cancers have been identified: overexposure to ultraviolet rays of the sun, excessive radiation, smoking cigarettes and contact with certain chemicals."

Nowhere is it mentioned that the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health is part of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare estimates that 6 million Americans are exposed to known carcinogens in their work places. Among them are hospital operating room personnel, dye workers, coke oven workers, certain wood workers and others who have been shown to be at increased risk of the disease.

Nor is it stated by ACS that several substances, such as saccharin and several widely prescribed drugs and food colors, have been identified as suspect in this regard. A request to the District of Columbia chapter of the ACS for literature on origins and prevention of cancer brought the reply, "I wish we had something like that."

An ACS compilation of its own research spending in fiscal 1975 shows that it provided scientists with \$9,104,000 for new research projects that year, of that sum, \$22,000 was for environmental studies and \$145,300 for research on chemical carcinogens. In fiscal 1976, the total awarded for new research projects rose to \$13,281,000. There were no new awards in the environmental category; the sum for chemical carcinogenesis came out to \$384,000.

Research does not lend itself to simple definitional classifications, and it is quite likely that ACS projects under other labels have value for environmental studies. But measured in any terms, the causation and prevention of cancer — the main exception being cigarettes — has never figured large in ACS planning.

Efforts by congressional investigators to enlist ACS support against chemical carcinogens have almost invariably drawn no response. Rep. L. H. Fountain (D-N.C.), chairman of the subcommittee on intergovernmental relations of the House Government Operations Committee, recalls with some bitterness trying to obtain ACS assistance in connection with a series of hearings he held to prod the Food and Drug Administration to ban the synthetic estrogen diethylstilbestrol (DES) as an animal feed additive.

DES had been shown to have caused vaginal cancer in the teenage daughters of women who had taken the hormone to prevent miscarriages; it has since been shown to have caused sexual abnormalities in their sons as well. Fountain said, "We could never get anything but silence out of the society."

In June 1977, some six months after the hearings, Fountain also sought support from NCI's top advisory group, the National Cancer Advisory Board, many of whose members have close links to ACS. It was his hope that the board would take a position that would put pressure on FDA to ban the substance. Again, he was disap-

George E. Stringfellow, past senior vice president, Thomas A. Edison Industries, and Travis T. Wallace, founder and chairman emeritus, Great American Reserve Insurance Co.

The 109-member ACS House of Delegates, from which the 16-member National Board of Directors is drawn, includes similar eminences, among them Mary Laster, the best-known woman in national medical politics, who has been honorary chairman of the board since 1957.

There is no black or labor union representative among the 32 life members, though this year, for the first time in ACS history, the president-elect is a black, Dr. LaSalle D. Leftrall Jr. of Howard University. There is only one black and one labor representative among the 184 members of the House of Delegates. Ninety-four of the delegates are lay members, of these, 18 are senior officers or directors of banks, seven are members of investment firms and 19 are business or industrial executives.

Whatever it is that leads to the policies that the board sets for the ACS, certain aspects of the policies are troubling to some scientists. Dr. Robert L. Handischumacher, chairman of the Yale Medical School department of pharmacology, reports that he once tried to interest Lane Adams, the ACS executive vice president, in a more aggressive approach toward the rapidly rising cancer incidence and low survival rate in blacks. Handischumacher says that Adams rejected the suggestion on the ground that "blacks don't give much to the society anyway." Adams denies ever having said this but adds, "All minority groups are very difficult to reach, both with programs as well as our [fundraising] crusade."

Overwhelming the NCI

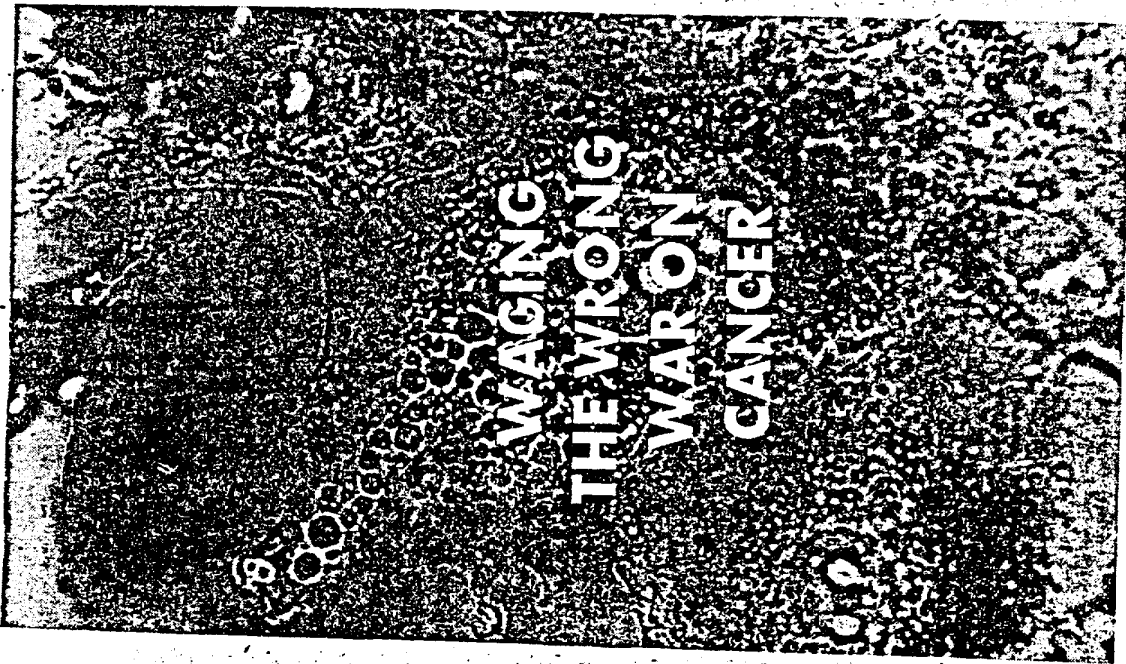
WITH ALL THIS social and business power at its command, the ACS has usually been able to overwhelm the civil servants of the NCI. In the opinion of Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.), who has been urging NCI to put additional resources into identifying environmental carcinogens, ACS wants to keep the Cancer Institute strong in bankroll and weak in staff so that it can direct its spending without too much interference.

The contrast in styles of the two organizations was illustrated by the relative positions they took in 1971, when President Nixon and Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), then a presumed presidential aspirant, entered into a bizarre competition to become the nation's champion against cancer. The ACS, with honorary board chairman Mary Lasker making use of her political connections, pushed hard to sever the Cancer Institute from the National Institutes of Health complex and give it an autonomous status, the object being greater visibility and an end to cancer having to compete with other diseases for government research funds. Established as an independent agency, along the lines of NASA, the proposed Conquest of Cancer Agency would have an unobstructed pipeline to the Treasury.

In those days, confidence was high that virus causation played a major role in human cancer and both newspaper reports of the period and congressional testimony were replete with accounts of research findings implying that, given enough money, it would be only a matter of time before antiques or preventive vaccines became available.

The ACS now concedes that this hope is somewhat remote and has said nothing on the subject recently. But since viruses, in contrast to industrially spawned chemicals, have never had a lobby, the beauty of the virus emphasis was that no establishment oxen need be goaded apart from tobacco, which had long before demonstrated an ability to survive government designation as a proven killer. Meanwhile, more than \$717 million has been spent since 1965 on a so far futile effort to identify a virus that unquestionably causes cancer in men.

With Nixon and Kennedy sprinting to win favor with the cancer lobby, NCI researchers suggested that, scientifically, it might not be a sound idea to detach cancer research from the overall biomedical research effort. However, with the Nixon administration joining them



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board members Mary Lasker and Elmer Bobst — both long influential in ACS affairs — joined other members of the board in thinking Fountain and expressing interest in the background material he sent them, but the DFC issue was not added to the board's agenda.

Defending Saccharin

WHEN THE Food and Drug Administration recently announced its intention to ban saccharin as a carcinogen, the move was denounced by the president of the ACS, Dr. E. Lee Clark, who until recently was a member of the President's Cancer Panel, a three-member statutory body that serves as a direct link between the National Cancer Institute and the White House. Opening the society's annual science writers' seminar, which was held this year in Sarasota, Fla., Clark said that "there is no evidence that [saccharin] causes human cancer" — despite the fact that FDA's scientists, like their Canadian counterparts, found the evidence of Canadian animal tests so compelling that they recommended the ban. Clark's argument in behalf of the artificial sweetener was that its value for obesity control outweighs its alleged carcinogenicity — a curious conclusion for the head of an organization dedicated to the eradication of cancer and one that is controversial among diabetologists and experts on weight control.

And Frank Rauscher (director of NCI from 1972 to 1976, now director of research for ACS), while "confessing," as he put it, that he was the principal author of the official ACS statement from which Clark drew his remarks, admitted that he had drafted the statement without having read the Canadian study that caused the FDA to act.

Meanwhile, Alan C. Davis, the ACS vice president for governmental relations, acknowledged that ACS national headquarters in New York had received many reports from local chapters that they had been flooded with calls from people who mistakenly thought the society had instigated the proposed ban.

Davis denied firmly that the society was pressured into taking its pro-saccharin stand. But he was frank to say that many of these callers had threatened to withhold gifts during the society's April fundraising drive unless the ACS made its position satisfactorily clear.

Meanwhile, the ACS position on saccharin is giving some of its staunchest scientific supporters serious concern.

Among these is Nobel prizewinner David Baltimore, whose chair in microbiology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is financed by the ACS. At the science writers' seminar, Baltimore said that "my understanding the implication of the Delaney amendment [which prohibits the intentional addition of carcinogenic compounds to commercial foodstuffs]... the American Cancer Society has done the American people a dangerous disservice" and set "a dangerous precedent."

Speaking of the Calbert Control Council, whose diet-drink industry membership uses more than 75 per cent of the saccharin consumed in this country and which has been running a nationwide pro-saccharin and anti-Delaney newspaper advertising campaign, he added: "I really believe that the Cancer Society has been playing into their hands."

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ACS does in fact acknowledge a relationship with the Coca-Cola Company, a pillar of the Calbert Control Council and manufacturer of the artificially sweetened soft drink. Tab. In its latest annual report, the society notes that "a generous grant from the Coca-Cola Company supported transportation" for an ACS delegation of "volunteers and staff officers" that visited the Soviet Union last June.

Unequal Relationship

TO UNDERSTAND the politics of cancer research, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society, the richest by far of American disease-related philanthropies — with a current budget of \$114 million — and the highest-paying when it comes to salaries for its national headquarters bureaucracy. (In ACS' latest available tax-exempt filing with the Internal Revenue Service, covering fiscal year 1975, the top staff salary reported was \$64,766, and the five highest salaries averaged out to \$51,602. In that same year, its nearest financial competitor in health-related charities, the American Heart Association, reported \$50,751 as its top staff salary, and the five highest averaged \$41,043. Since then, the top ACS salary has risen to at least \$76,000; this is the figure that was announced as Rauscher's salary when he quit government service last year to join ACS.)

Founded in 1877 as the first component of what eventually became the multi-billion-dollar National Institutes of Health, NCI evolved into a scientifically competent organization that performs research in its own laboratories and provides funds for research in universities, hospitals and other non-government institutions. Spending by its own administrative and research staff takes up only 13 per cent of the current \$315 million budget. The rest goes outside — which means that NCI is a bonafide of formidable proportions for the support of cancer research in non-government facilities.

NCI's scientific and fiscal prowess, however, has always been accompanied by political timidity and caution, even after the National Cancer Act of 1971 more than tripled its budget in six years.

The ACS, on the other hand, is a building, nationwide organization whose stated "objective is to eliminate cancer entirely as a human disease." Toward this goal, it has become extraordinarily adept at influencing public attitudes and hopes — and pocketbooks.

For years, ACS fund raisers routinely told the public that the organization was unable to finance promising research "due to insufficient funds." Last year, the National Information Bureau, a charity-monitoring service, challenged ACS on the ground that it was making this claim at a time when it had over \$31 million in uncommitted reserves. The ACS board responded that in its appraisal ACS "will now place research in perspective as part of the overall program needs."

Headquartered in New York, where it was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1822, ACS is the best organized of disease-related charities, with 58 chartered divisions within which are nearly 2,800 local units; all in all, it has nearly 2,900 paid staff members and some 2.5 million volunteers, ranging from coin-collecting door-

bell ringers to recovered cancer patients who counseled the newly afflicted.

Through research, the objective that ACS emphasizes in its fundraising appeals, is the largest single activity. It actually is only a minor part of the society's budget activities, occupying only 28.3 per cent of last year's budget. Not far behind, with a combined total of 20 per cent, were the categories of "fund raising" and "management & general." "Professional education," "patient services," "community services" and several other activities received the balance.

These proportions are more or less common in the health-charity field; the American Heart Association, for example, closely matches ACS' research allocations, with 28 per cent going into that category.

But as the largest organization of its type, ACS is the plump target for criticism of what appears to some as relatively low opportunities for research and service programs and high opportunities for fundraising and salaries.

In its latest annual report, for example, ACS Executive Vice President Lane W. Adams states, "We expect to have criticism, and we would be surprised if there were none. Since we don't evangelize about cancer, it is understandable that promoters of unproven methods of cancer treatment would seek to discredit the society. The only sure way to turn off student critics is to stop working responsibly in the cancer field."

The Power Elite

THE POWER of the ACS doesn't come from its money or programs, which are relatively small in comparison to the burgeoning budgets of the National Cancer Institute. Rather, ACS power comes from its ability to influence the spending strategy of the politically passive NCI. ACS actually receives only a small slice of NCI's money, but it wields great influence over where the bulk of the money goes. ACS accomplishes this through an intricate network of influential people who have been enlisted in the crusade.

While NCI has traditionally been administered by obscure civil servants — more timid than most, since thorough-and-tumble of Washington politics — ACS, nationally and in thousands of community chapters, has evolved into a socially attractive gathering place for the philanthropic elite (the annual Cancer Ball is a stellar social event in many communities) where good intentions and good connections are firmly cemented by the universal dread of cancer.

With the leadership of the ACS more or less evenly divided between individuals and researchers and physicians, the former category reads like a Who's Who of the American establishment.

In the category of life members — "persons of eminence who have rendered outstanding service in the cause of cancer control" — are a select 32, among whom the lay persons include such past and present ACS leaders as Elmer Bobst, a longtime executive and now non-executive director of the Warner-Lambert pharmaceutical company; Emerson Fente, co-founder of the Fente, Cone & Redding advertising agency; J. Leonard Reinsch, board chairman, Cox Cable Communications; Matthew B. Rosenblatt, board chairman, the J. B. Williams Co.;

a separate cancer research community, the issue was resolved with a compromise that gave NCI semi-autonomous status. Plus a direct, and unique, link to the White House through a newly established three-member President's Cancer Panel. Appointed to chair the panel was Bruno Schmidt, managing partner of the J. H. Whitney investment firm and an old ally of Mrs. Lasker.

As chairman of the panel for the past six years, Schmidt has been industrious beyond anyone's expectations. Well-informed, imperious and well-connected with the political figures who determine NCI's budget, he has also been a consistent damper on efforts to steer NCI into a greater commitment on environmental carcinogenesis.

Schmidt's approach, which is the same that is used by the ACS, is that the top priority should be given to lung cancer and its principal cause, cigarettes, plus continued emphasis on basic research. That lung cancer and its causation merit a high priority is beyond dispute. The disease tops the list, with 23 per cent of all cancer deaths; the cure rate remains low and the incidence is rising.

Nevertheless, as other causes of cancer have been identified, Schmidt, in his powerful position as chairman of the President's Panel, has generally discouraged an expansion of the environmental strategy beyond cigarettes.

Thus, in January, 1976, at a meeting where NCI staff members presented their case for further environmental studies and public education on chemical carcinogenesis, Schmidt responded that "one of the things that has been concerning me in recent months is that we are diluting the public urge to get rid of cigarette smoking by including, considerably more conspicuously than my opinion than is the case with cigarettes, a lot of other things in the publicity... It goes without saying that if we know what causes cancer and if we could remove it without removing the whole environment, we would remove those things forthwith."

In a telephone interview last week, Schmidt said that he was not opposed to environmental research, and noted that NCI funds in this category had risen from \$87.5 million in fiscal 1976 to a projected \$127.5 million for next year. "I was objecting," he said in regard to his 1975 remarks, "to causing the public to put cigarettes in the same category as things on which the evidence isn't as strong."

Three years after Congress and the President declared the war on cancer, the neglect of environmental studies caused NCI's top science advisory body to appoint a subcommittee to examine the issue.

Reporting back on its deliberations, the subcommittee stated: "There was an obvious sense of general astonishment throughout the meetings that the National Cancer Program does not appear to have accorded an adequate priority nor sense of urgency to the field of environmental carcinogenesis, particularly where this concerns chemical carcinogens."

As part of its response to this indictment, NCI transferred nearly \$4 million to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to support environmental carcinogenesis research.

