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GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE

Thursday, January 20, 2005

Cancer passes heart disease as biggest killer

By MARILYNN MARCHIONE
AP Medical Writer

For the first time, cancer has surpassed heart disease as the top killer of Americans younger than 85, health officials said Wednesday. The good news is that deaths from both are falling, but improvement has been more dramatic for heart disease.

"It's dropping fast enough that another disease is eclipsing it," said Dr. Walter Tsou, president of the American Public Health Association.

The single biggest reason is fewer smokers.

The news is contained in the American Cancer Society's annual statistical report, released Wednesday. In 2002, the most recent year for which information is available, 476,009 Americans under 85 died of cancer, compared with 450,637 who died of heart disease.

That trend began in 1999, but "this is the first time we've looked at this by age," said Ahmedin Jemal, a cancer society epidemiologist and main author of the report.

Those under 85 make up 98.4 percent of the population, said Dr. Eric Feuer, chief of statistical research for the National Cancer Institute who also worked on the report.

That means that only the very oldest Americans continue to die of heart disease more than of cancer, a trend that is expected to reverse by 2018, said Dr. Harmon Eyre, the cancer society's longtime medical officer.

"This is a situation in which neither one of us wants to be No. 1" because far more deaths could be prevented, said Dr. Rose Marie Robertson, chief scientific officer of the American Heart Association.

A third of all cancers are related to smoking, and another third are related to obesity, poor diets and lack of exercise — all factors that also contribute to heart disease.

Cancer becomes top killer of most Americans

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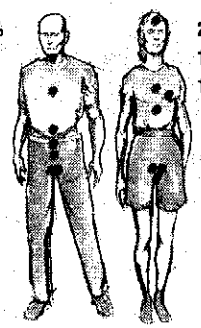
Rate of cancer deaths by type for top cancers in all ages*

MALE		FEMALE	
Lung	31%	27%	Lung
Prostate	10	15	Breast
Colon and rectum	10	10	Colon and rectum
Pancreas	5	6	Ovary
Leukemia	4	6	Pancreas
Esophagus	4	4	Leukemia
Liver	3	3	Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma	3	3	Uterine
Bladder	3	2	Multiple myeloma
Kidney	3	2	Nervous system**



* Estimates for 2005 ** Includes brain

SOURCE: American Cancer Society

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SENATE NATURAL RESOURCES
EXHIBIT NO. 4
DATE 1/21/2005
BILL NO. SB 236