

Guest Commentary by Michael Milken

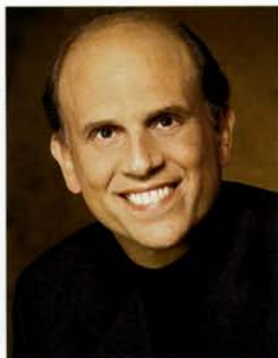
Where's Sputnik?

We Americans have a tradition of rising to a challenge. We fought for and won our independence. Later, when the Civil War tore the country apart, we bound up our wounds and created a stronger nation. And when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the first man-made Earth satellite, we responded by putting astronauts on the moon in little more than a decade.

But when it comes to cancer, there is no Sputnik, no single shocking event that galvanizes our response.

Cancer is so common—half of all men and a third of women will be diagnosed—that our society has come to think of it as almost normal. Fortunately, “normal” can change over time. When I was a child, the 4-minute mile was considered a nearly impossible achievement. Yet once Roger Bannister, a young medical student, broke through that psychological barrier, 16 other runners beat the 4-minute “limit” within a year.

Under the leadership of Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach, NCI has outlined



a program to eliminate cancer as a cause of death and suffering by 2015. While a partnership of government, academic, and private industry researchers will lead that effort, there's also an important role for those of us who are patients.

Like millions of Americans, I've experienced the devastating effects of cancer firsthand. Before my own diagnosis, I'd already lost 10 relatives, including my father and mother-in-law, to the disease. After two decades of focusing on all cancers, I founded the Prostate Cancer Foundation in 1993. Seven years ago, it was my privilege to help lead hundreds of thousands

of patients and advocates on the National Mall and in cities across the country demanding “No More Cancer!” Since then, Congress has nearly doubled America's cancer research budget. In 2003, we launched FasterCures—a Washington, D.C.-based center of the Milken Institute—to accelerate the pace of discovery for all deadly diseases. The FasterCures PHD Program—Patients Helping Doctors—highlights the crucial role individual patients can play in the search for cures by releasing their medical records, donating tissue

samples, and participating in clinical trials. (For more information, go to <http://www.fastercures.org>.)

Other keys to finding cures faster include full implementation of the National Health Information Network and expansion of the cancer Biomedical Informatics Grid initiative to link cancer researchers nationwide. Technology can also bridge the gap between research and care by putting patients in the center of the process and giving them electronic access to and control over their clinical data.

More than 30 years after the National Cancer Act, we've made some important progress. Cancer patients like Bob Dole and John Kerry have run for President and seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong has shown that even metastasized cancer need not be a barrier to great achievement. Yet as a society, we can do more—much more. For the first time in history, we hold the potential of eliminating cancer's burden. It will take a monumental effort, but the rewards will benefit all future generations. ♦

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Featured Meetings and Events

A calendar of scientific meetings and events sponsored by the National Institutes of Health is available at <http://calendar.nih.gov/cgi-bin/calendar> ♦

The *NCI Cancer Bulletin* is produced by the National Cancer Institute (NCI). NCI, which was established in 1937, leads the national effort to eliminate the suffering and death due to cancer. Through basic, clinical, and population-based biomedical research and training, NCI conducts and supports research that will lead to a future in which we can identify the environmental and genetic causes of cancer, prevent cancer before it starts, identify cancers that do develop at the earliest stage, eliminate cancers through innovative treatment interventions, and biologically control those cancers that we cannot eliminate so they become manageable, chronic diseases.

For more information on cancer, call 1-800-4-CANCER or visit <http://www.cancer.gov>.

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