102nd Congress’ Attention to Cancer Remains Significant

Cancer issues continue to be of interest to members of Congress and their constituencies. Among issues addressed in the 102nd Congress were women’s health, cancer registries, regulation of tobacco products, medicare coverage, and the drug approval process.


This legislation, tied to the reauthorization bill for the National Institutes of Health, directs the secretary of Health and Human Services to enter into grants or contracts with states to operate population-based, statewide registries that collect data for each form of in-situ and invasive cancer, except basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma of the skin.

The proposed bill explicitly states that the National Cancer Institute’s Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program should not be modified or terminated as a result of the establishment of the program. It also states that the secretary cannot transfer the administration of the SEER program from NCI.

Tobacco


If enacted, this bill would give the DHHS secretary authority to regulate non-tobacco products that contain nicotine, which will be categorized as a drug. The bill also would require that tobacco manufacturers fully disclose all chemical additives in tobacco products, and prohibit the distribution of free samples and coupons for cigarettes.

Synar said this amendment puts the regulation and sale of tobacco products under the federal government’s control.

Prevention

Rep. Benjamin Gilman (D-N.Y.) introduced the Comprehensive Health Care Act of 1992 to establish preventive
health care services and coverage under the Medicare program, the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, and health programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Cancer-related services to be covered would include: prostate-specific antigen tests for men over 49 years of age; mammography screening; clinical breast examinations; and pap smears.

Vermont's Sanders also introduced a resolution directing the DHHS secretary to declare breast cancer a public health emergency to accelerate investigation into the cause, treatment, and prevention of breast cancer. The bill also states that activities initiated under the emergency should not supplant the planning, review, and budgeting of multi-year major research projects on the cause, treatment, and prevention of breast cancer.

Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ.) introduced on March 12 an amendment to title 39, United States Code, to add bronchoalveolar carcinoma to the list of diseases presumed to be service-connected for certain radiation-exposed veterans.

A Senate bill, the RU-486 Regulatory Fairness Act, introduced by Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), would make the import restriction imposed by the Food and Drug Administration ineffective. If enacted, grants submitted to the FDA for RU-486 would be given full consideration under Section 505 of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. The House companion bill was introduced by Rep. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) at the beginning of the first session of the 102nd Congress. As of March 31, the bill had 60 co-sponsors.

Commending Progress

The Senate introduced a resolution urging the FDA to continue reviewing the approval process for experimental drugs. In part, the resolution commends the FDA for its progress in revising the new drug approval process.

The resolution also recommends that the FDA revise the system for new drug approval to incorporate a process to allow approval of new drugs in a more timely, yet medically safe manner. The process is to include measures by which terminally ill patients, following consultation with and approval from their physicians, can have access to experimental drugs awaiting FDA approval.

In the House, Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.) introduced the DES Education and Research Amendments of 1992, directing the DHHS secretary to establish a program to conduct and support research and training on DES, to disseminate health information on DES, and to provide for longitudinal studies on individuals who have been exposed to DES.

– Sylvia Bennett

Awards, Appointments, Announcements

The 1992 Wise Lifetime Achievement Award was presented recently to Claude E. B. Klee, M.D., chief of the National Cancer Institute's Laboratory of Biochemistry, in the Division of Cancer Biology, Diagnosis, and Centers. Klee has been researching calcium's regulation of essential cellular communications. According to the award announcement, her studies "have yielded new and fundamental insights into the mechanisms by which proteins communicate information to each other in the cell."

Klee also was cited because she has had extensive influence on the research of others, and for advancing the opportunities of women in science.

The Wise (Women in Science and Engineering, Inc.) Awards have been presented since 1985 to federally employed women scientists and engineers.

Pharmacy Award

The highest award of the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists will go to Roger W. Anderson, head of the