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We can still improve fight against cancer

JORGE LUIS LOPEZ, The Miami Herald

World **Cancer** Day, which falls on Feb. 4 this year, unites the world in the **fight against cancer**. The 2015 theme - Not Beyond Us - explores how implementing what we already know about prevention, early detection, treatment and care **can** impact the global **cancer** burden for the better. The evidence supports this bold proclamation.

The latest **cancer** statistics show that the **cancer** death rate has dropped 22 percent in the past two decades. This translates to more than 1.5 million **cancer** deaths avoided, or almost 500 lives saved every day - and more birthdays. These numbers are encouraging, but they are not a reason to stop fighting. On the contrary. I am honored to join more than 3 million passionate fellow volunteers that make up the American **Cancer** Society - a global grassroots force fighting for every birthday threatened by every form of **cancer** in every community. At the society we combine an unyielding passion with a century of experience to save lives and end suffering from **cancer**.

I'm privileged to serve on the American **Cancer** Society's National Board - as one of only 21 national members - I serve as a steward for change in the way we view and responds to **cancer** - globally. This year, more than 1.5 million individuals will be diagnosed with **cancer** - and minorities remain at a higher risk.

Cancer is the leading cause of death for Hispanics - roughly one in two Hispanic men and one in three Hispanic women will be diagnosed with **cancer** in their lifetimes. The lifetime probability of dying from **cancer** is one in five for Hispanic men and one in six for Hispanic women. The death rate for all cancers combined continues to be 32 percent higher in African-American men and 16 percent higher in African-American women than in white men and women, respectively.

Dr. Joe Greer, associate dean for community engagement at FIU Medical School, confirms that this killer disproportionately affects our community - but a cure is not beyond us. **We** are more vulnerable because of sometimes limited access to healthcare and other socioeconomic factors, therefore we cannot afford to stand idly by. The society is committed to work together with local leaders to tackle this problem.

The society's research and resources have helped save countless lives worldwide. In fact, most recently two American **Cancer** Society-funded researchers won the Nobel Prize - bringing the total number of society-funded Nobel Prize winners to 46. Our community needs to become better aware of these premier society resources to ensure that we are no longer disproportionately affected.

The society's free, comprehensive patient services and programs help with the emotional, physical and psychological needs associated with **cancer**. To learn more about us or to get help, call us anytime - day or night - at 1-800-227-2345. Early screening is key for us all. Recent studies indicate that annual CT scans for lung **cancer can** reduce lung-**cancer** deaths by up to 20 percent; genetic testing and preemptive surgeries **can** reduce the risk of developing breast **cancer** from as high as 95 percent to less than 5 percent.

This kind of information makes **cancer** less daunting and threatening - as a community we **can** approach **cancer** proactively and aggressively, ultimately turning **cancer** into a manageable illness. I invite you to join us to affect change and save lives. In 2015, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and southern Broward counties will host 23 Relays for Life - kicking off at FIU on Feb. 27.

Relays for Life are all crucial to our community, raising money and awareness while serving as a celebration for **cancer** survivors, a memorial for loved ones and a rally for the community. To start a team, join a committee or sponsor one of our local overnight events visit www.RelayForLife.org.

Let this World **Cancer** Day be our starting point to making a change in the way **cancer** affects our community. I challenge you to join our **fight against cancer** at the American **Cancer** Society, where we save lives and create more birthdays by helping you stay well, helping you get well, by finding cures and by fighting back.

Jorge Luis Lopez, an attorney in Coral Gables, was recently named to the national American **Cancer** Society Board.

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