



**Ambassador Nancy G. Brinker
Founder, Susan G. Komen for the Cure®
Remarks to the National Press Club
November 23, 2009**

Good morning, it is good to be with you today.

I wish I were here to announce that Susan G. Komen for the Cure® has found the cure for breast cancer, and I look forward to the day when I will make that announcement. I'm confident we will find a cure, but until we do, we've got to focus on what we know works.

And what works is what we know – early detection, awareness, research, and treatment. And yes . . . *screening, mammography, and self-awareness.*

Just look at the facts.

- Today, the 5-year survival rate for breast cancers that haven't spread from the breast is now 98 percent in the US compared to 74 percent in 1982. 98 percent.
- There are more than 2.5 million breast cancer survivors alive in the U.S. today – the largest group of all cancer survivors. I want to remind you that these 2.5 million women are real women – our mothers, daughters, wives, sisters.

Last summer, I met a breast cancer survivor in California who said she'd been living for 18 years since being diagnosed. Now 18 years is fantastic but really not that rare any more. But I was amazed when this woman identified her cancer as end stage four, one of the deadliest stages.

18 years of a woman's life isn't a cost. It's an invaluable benefit to a family and to our country, to our social fabric and to our national strength and values.

That's why these reports and all the controversy from the last week have taken a tremendous toll. I believe they have set us back.

First, they resulted in mass confusion and justifiable outrage. The women I heard from were angry and worried. They believe that the mammogram they had – which detected their cancer – saved their lives.

They believe that they did the right things, they did what we told them to do, and that they are alive today because those safeguards and recommendations were in place.

I don't blame them for being concerned about future generations of women, because we've spent 30 years -- 30 years -- acculturating women (and men, for that matter) to take a more active role in their health. And we have made great progress. Then this report comes out and it just raises questions.

We have worked so hard to build that public trust. Clarity is critical. So let me say as clearly as I can – as a breast cancer survivor whose cancer was found on a mammogram...and as leader of the world's largest breast cancer organization...let me say clearly to anyone watching:

- *Mammography _ Saves _ Lives*, even this report says that.
- Keep doing what you're doing.
- And always, talk with your doctor.
- At Susan G. Komen for the Cure, we're not changing our guidelines

We can't afford to. Because for all the progress we've made against breast cancer, it's still the leading killer of women in America between the ages of 40 and 60.

- 1 in 8 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime.
- In the U.S., nearly 200,000 women and men will be diagnosed with breast cancer and more than 40,000 will die this year.

Which brings me to my second point, which is *access to care*.

One-third of American women – 23 million – who need the most basic screening and mammography, are not getting it today. That's right folks. There is no disagreement about this. So after all we've done to urge people to get screened, they now hear that maybe they shouldn't bother. That is dangerous.

We spend over \$2.2 trillion per year on health care in the United States, we can cover 23 million women for a tiny fraction of that, and we should.

I'd also like to say that any insurance company that thinks this report could be used as a way to reduce coverage for mammography now or at some point in the future . . . *we'll be watching*.

So access, clarity, and the public trust are critical, but so too is technology. And in a strange way, all the dustup from the past weeknight actually do some good, which brings me to my third point: technology.

We know mammography works but we also know it is an imperfect technology. We DO need better screening technology. We must close the technology gap in breast cancer and cancer screening. At Susan G. Komen for the Cure, we are funding cutting edge research, but we can't do it alone.

We need technology that is:

- More predictive and more available and more personal, but less Expensive and less aggressive.

This isn't rocket science – we can do it if we have the political will.

I have spoken with the NIH Director this week, and I am announcing today that Susan G. Komen for the Cure will host a major summit where the top leaders from the public health, scientific, governmental, and advocacy communities will work to identify specific ways to close this technology gap. That summit will be held very soon.

But we already know one way to help close this technology gap, and that is in screening research and development.

That's why I'm also calling today on the President and Congress to report to the American people on investments they've made in screening technology and to commit to us that they will redouble their efforts to create a technology that is more specific, more accessible and with more sensitivity.

Because if we make technology better, more predictive, less expensive, and more available, we can avoid having this discussion five or ten years from now.

So better technology, more access, and continuing to speak clearly

It all begins with doing what we know works. And the stakes not only in the US but around the world are so high. Literally millions of lives

It seems like forever, but it was just two weeks ago that I returned from a twelve-day, six country tour that took me from Vienna, through Budapest and on to Amman, and Jerusalem, before ending in Zurich. It was my first extended foreign travel as both UN Ambassador for Cancer Control and Founder of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, and it was both encouraging and discouraging.

There is great progress being made in the fight against cancer and breast cancer. There is enthusiasm from leaders everywhere. These leaders know they have to do something, and that's encouraging. They know that cancer is universally deadly, and our response must be equally universal.

The point is, we can't afford to slow down in our race against this disease. We can't get distracted. We've got to keep running for the finish line.

My fight began thirty ago with a promise I made to my sister Suzy to do everything I could to find a cure for breast cancer. I remember those days. When Suzy was first diagnosed, the world was much different.

People crossed the street in my hometown because they thought the disease was contagious. There was no Internet. There were no information hotlines. There were no global campaigns to educate people and spread awareness. *And there were no mammograms.* That was 30 years ago.

But as I said earlier, just last summer I met that breast cancer survivor with end stage four in California. This woman was living testament to what we've been able to accomplish.

- More early detection
- More hope
- More research, which is translating to longer lives
- And most importantly, more survivors

This shows what's possible.

Today we're talking about breast cancer in the US, but I hope you'll invite me back to talk with you about the global cancer crisis, because it is a story that needs to be told.

A story involving a deadly enemy that takes more lives every year than tuberculosis, malaria, and AIDS combined.

Why is it then, that this leading world killer is marginalized, and in many countries, flat out ignored?

Something is wrong when one of the most lethal diseases on earth isn't even mentioned by name in the public health reports of many countries. Something is wrong when cancer is often hidden away in the category of, quote, "other diseases" as it is in the Millennium Development Goals. Last year, 7.6 million lives were lost to this "other disease."

It would be like the State of Virginia being wiped out each year.

And it's only projected to get worse unless we fight back with everything we have.

The plain fact is that new cancer cases are projected to rise from 13 million to nearly 27 million in 2030. By then, cancer will kill some 17 million people, young and old, every year. And frankly, that's likely to be a considerable undercount. The actual numbers are hard to project, because we know that many deaths from cancer go unreported. In the statistical equivalent of an unmarked grave, the cause of their suffering and death isn't even specified.

So whether reported accurately or not, there are still too many people, here in the US and around the world, who are dying unnecessarily from cancer of all kinds. . .

We can do this. We know enough and have enough resources to make this happen. We can always use more but let's recommit ourselves to using what we have.

In so many areas of global health diplomacy, certainties are hard to come by. But I can promise you this: If we turn more of our energy and resources on this crisis, we can move faster toward saving more lives.

And thirty years' worth of laboring in this field has only left me feeling more confident in ultimate victory.

I think of a horrific disease...feared by generations...victims hidden away in the shadows...the hopelessness—that a cure or treatment would never be found.

Faced with an epidemic, ordinary citizens took action—raising money, funding research. Governments formed and funded new institutions. Scientists collaborated with a sense of urgency.

I'm not talking about cancer. I'm talking about Polio.

And on that day in 1955 when Jonas Salk's Polio vaccine was announced, it's said that in America "church bells rang, factories stopped in a moment of silence and parents and teachers wept...as if a war had ended."

Years later, Salk said: "In the past, man was concerned with death; his attitude was *anti-disease*. In the future, his attitudes will be *pro-health*. [We must] adapt...and cooperate and collaborate." Because, "with nature, we are the co-authors of our destiny."

The diseases, of course, are different, but the lesson is the same. Our destiny—our health—is still in our hands.

If we can forge an approach that is not simply anti-disease, but pro-health... not simply treatment, but prevention...

Then we, too, can imagine a day when another scientific breakthrough changes the world.

When the mastectomy—like the iron lungs of the Polio era—is an artifact of history...

And when church bells ring again because our war—on breast cancer and cancer—has ended in victory.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.