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The CEO's Role in Fighting Cancer

AT LEAST HALF OF ALL CANCER DEATHS ARE PREVENTABLE. BY WILLIAM C. WELDON

Few actions in the tenure of a CEO are more personally rewarding than saving and improving human lives. It is one reason I am so proud to be part of a company like Johnson & Johnson, a leader in health care whose products and services touch the lives of over a billion people every day. It is also the reason I have been motivated to be part of the CEO Roundtable on Cancer.

Cancer is the leading cause of death among people aged 25 to 65, the age group that is most representative of U.S. work forces, and it represents a challenge where all corporations can make a tremendous difference.

In 2001, former U.S. President George H.W. Bush asked a group of business executives to do "something bold and venturesome about cancer within their own corporate families." Today, 26 CEOs have made a pledge to lead this fight against cancer in workplaces across the U.S. as part of the CEO Roundtable. These CEOs, working with highly regarded health care experts, created the CEO Cancer Gold Standard to help companies prevent cancer, detect it early and ensure access to the best available treatment for those who are diagnosed.

The facts are one out of every two men, and one out of every three women, will personally hear the words "you have cancer" during their lives. The prevalence of this disease virtually ensures that your

employees and their family members are facing, and will continue to face, the challenge of fighting cancer.

While the personal toll can be difficult, sometimes unimaginable to calculate, the cost to business has been defined. And it is significant. The National Institute of Health estimates overall annual workplace cost for cancer at more than \$206 billion, including over \$110 billion from lost productivity due to premature death and an additional \$17.9 billion from lost productivity due to illness.

But there is hope amidst these sobering realities. At least half of all cancer deaths are preventable. I believe that is precisely why promising initiatives such as the Gold Standard merit our strong support.

The Gold Standard is a roadmap that companies can use to evaluate their employee benefits and corporate wellness culture and then take appropriate actions to improve their health plan components. By implementing simple and inexpensive policies, employers make a significant difference for their employees and also realize significant long-term savings.

Tobacco use, for instance, is the number one cause of cancer and the number one cause of preventable death throughout the world. Creating a tobacco-free workplace and helping employees quit can reduce health care costs, improve employees' health and well-being, and perhaps even reduce workplace insurance costs. Likewise, paying for recommended

cancer screenings can help identify cancer at its earliest stages when it can be treated more effectively and at less cost.

Gold Standard accreditation also helps organizations better manage health care costs related to diabetes and heart disease, which have many common risk factors and also can be prevented. Most important, all these actions lengthen and even save lives for employees and their family members.

As members of the CEO Roundtable on Cancer, we have taken a stand that is also a business-minded approach to fighting cancer, reforming and improving how we provide health benefits for our employees and their dependents. I am proud of my fellow CEO Roundtable members, all of whom embrace the Gold Standard and see the value for their employees and their businesses in joining this fight. ▲

William C. Weldon is chairman of the CEO Roundtable on Cancer and chairman and CEO of Johnson & Johnson. For more information about the CEO Cancer Gold Standard, please visit www.cancergoldstandard.org.

