



# CARY MAGAZINE

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IN 2001, DR. MARTIN J. MURPHY JR. and 13 other chief executive officers met in the board room of GlaxoSmithKline with a mandate to be bold and venturesome. But the cancer researcher and his colleagues didn't increase the bottom line or develop a new product. They didn't discuss how to make their stock price go up. These business leaders were chosen by George H.W. Bush to do something personally important to the former president.

At that time the CEO Roundtable on Cancer was born, hand-picked movers and shakers who knew how to get things done. The president asked them to find ways to battle cancer in the workplace.

"The first thing we did was have a good debate," said Murphy. In the end, they decided to "perform at our companies, an examination of conscience." How were their own companies doing at cancer prevention?

Later in 2001 the Roundtable met again in Houston, Texas. "Most companies were already at acme of health care," said Murphy, "yet when they reconvened they discovered, happily, not one company around the table had the ultimate package. Everyone discovered something else they could do."

So they developed the CEO Cancer Gold Standard, a criterion for companies to help their employees prevent and combat cancer. The standard was developed by a task force that included the Centers for Disease Control, The National Cancer Institute, The American Cancer Society and The Mayo Clinic. Any company in America, big or small, profit or not-for-profit, can pursue accreditation in the Gold Standard.

"The CEO Cancer Gold Standard is a powerful program that

advances the elimination of cancer as a public health threat. But on a more personal level, it also is a boon to employees and their families," said George Bush, the 41st president of the United States.

"As such, I take great pride in the CEO Roundtable on Cancer that developed the Gold Standard, and I urge businesses large and small, for-profit and not-for-profit, to embrace it. This is a marvelous example of America's corporate leadership at its golden best.

There are five pillars to the Gold Standard:

- Tobacco use
- Diet and nutrition
- Physical activity
- Prevention, screening and early detection
- Access to quality treatment and clinical trials

"It's not a box that is ticked on an HR form and considered done," said Murphy. "It's a culture that needs to be considered in an organization." He laughed when he recalled how before the Gold Standard, the now-expansive salad bar in SAS' cafeteria was only a salad nook.

In 2002, Dennie Norman was making plans to leave Sweden for a job with SAS in Cary when he learned cancer had struck for the second time in four years. The 57-year-old marketing director was diagnosed with deadly pancreatic cancer.

When he called SAS with the news, they told him to just get well and join them when he could. SAS was particularly ready to help Norman because of that meeting of CEOs a year earlier.

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## DR. MARTIN J. MURPHY JR.

Fighting cancer head-on in the workplace

WRITTEN BY LYNN MERCER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN MULLINS

Fast forward to 2007. Keith Holdaway, a 48-year-old principal developer for SAS spoke at that year's Roundtable meeting on how SAS' accreditation helped him through cancer diagnosed five years earlier.

But what he didn't know at the time was that the cancer had returned. But SAS was still up to the Gold Standard. "Dr. Murphy telephoned me at home. He drew upon an allegory relating to mountain climbers who scale large peaks only to venture for a while amid the valleys and beautiful scenery, and then face perhaps another peak in the range," Holdaway said. "He claimed he was tethered to me as I made this climb, and so not to falter, as I was leading him to a cure."

"It's a gift to the nation because it costs nothing," said Murphy. "Fill out an application; you'll see you're close to accreditation." Applications are available at [www.cancer-goldstandard.org](http://www.cancer-goldstandard.org).

Right now, SAS, GSK, Quintiles and Duke Health System are the only local com-

panies that have achieved accreditation, but Murphy hopes this will change.

"Employers ought to be recognizing that that's an attractant," he said. "It makes good sense. Now it's being shown it makes good business sense." Business was always secondary when it came to the work of the Roundtable, but Murphy does say the biggest challenge to businesses today is health spending.

Currently, Dr. Murphy works as a consultant to companies developing novel cancer drugs, and is also editor of two medical journals, *The Oncologist* and *Stem Cells*. But the Roundtable is his greatest passion.

**"Employers ought to be recognizing that that's an attractant. It makes good sense. Now it's being shown it makes good business sense."**

— Dr. Murphy

"It's not a question of how can we make money, but how can we make life more worth living," he said.

"One in two men will sit across a table and hear their doctor say: 'You have cancer.' One in three women will receive that same diagnosis. I don't know of any family not being touched."

And although he works with pharmaceutical companies seeking the next breakthrough drug, he can't speak highly enough about the Roundtable program. "This is the thing that I know works. This works all the time," he said. "The challenge is to get the message out and implement it."

Murphy has one more surprising reveal: He too is a cancer patient. He gets treated every 28 days. The disease developed after he worked on the Gold Standard, so Dr. Murphy is also a beneficiary of his own program. That keeps the disease under control. That, he said, plus vigilance, reserve and a bit of Irish luck. ◀