

TULSA WORLD

Letter to the Editor: Discussing the big 'Big C'

BY Sheppard F. Miers Jr., Tulsa
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Cancer. Should that be discussed? It is an "ill, misfortune, or other unpleasantness" - topics traditionally listed as ones to avoid in conversation.

Yet, cancer has to be talked about by far too many Oklahomans and their families. Despite progress, the war on cancer, now having been declared for 40 years (by National Cancer Act of 1971), is not even close to being won. More than 571,000 deaths, or one each minute, are expected from cancer in the United States in 2011.

In Oklahoma, 18,000 people are stricken by cancer annually. Oklahoma's cancer mortality rate remains among the highest in the U.S. - seventh nationally. Tobacco and smoking are taxed and avoided less in Oklahoma than other states. Oklahoma is a national "leader" in obesity rates. Smoking and obesity are preventable contributors to cancer incidence and deaths.

On the positive side, the new Peggy and Charles Stephenson Oklahoma Cancer Center has the goal of becoming a National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center. It offers phase one clinical trials, internationally recognized researchers and related life-saving cancer prevention and treatment programs.

So talk about the urgent need to change cancer's effect on Oklahoma. Keep telling U.S. and state legislators about it. Ask them to vote now for action, research and dollars to prevent, control and finally end the disease. If that were achieved, cancer - and whether and when the word should be used - would no longer be a concern.

Editor's note: *Miers is director of the Charlene Miers Foundation for Cancer Research.*