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On World Cancer Day, Experts See Growing Global Cancer Gap As Critical Obstacle to Progress Against the Disease

-- Growth in Cancer Incidence and Death in Developing World Contrast with Improving Outcomes in Wealthy Nations; Experts Seek Expanded Access to Cancer Care in Poor Countries --

(Paris, 3 February, 2010) -- While prevention, diagnosis and access to sophisticated and effective cancer treatment continues to grow in the wealthiest countries of the world, low- and middle-income nations face rapidly increasing cancer caseloads with little or no access to prevention, treatment or care – including basic palliative care for pain relief. The result is a large and growing gap between cancer outcomes in developed and developing countries that threatens global progress against the disease, say experts reviewing global efforts against cancer this World Cancer Day, February 4, 2010.

Already, more than half of new cancer cases and more than 60% of global cancer deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Globally, cancer now kills more people than AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined. With incidence of a wide variety of cancers increasing rapidly in developing countries and access to cancer care extremely limited, the cancer death rate in low- and middle-income countries is expected to be more than five times that of the industrialized world by the end of this decade.

Data from the recently concluded CONCORD study found wide variations in global cancer survival rates, with patients in poorer countries, including countries in Eastern Europe, South America and Northern Africa faring much worse than those diagnosed with the same cancers in Western Europe, North America, Japan or Australia, where improved prevention, diagnosis and treatment has led to steady declines in cancer death rates in recent years.

A major new study led by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and published in December 2009 in *The Lancet Oncology* provides additional evidence of the growing cancer gap cited by experts today. In that study, breast cancer survival five years following diagnosis was 12% in The Gambia but nearly 80% in South Korea. While 13% of women diagnosed with cervical cancer survived five years in Uganda, survival rates were more than five times greater in Singapore. Survival rates for stomach and large bowel cancer in African nations studied were frequently just 10% of those of wealthier nations.

“The rapidly rising incidence of a number of cancers and the extremely poor access to cancer diagnosis and treatment in most low- and middle-income countries has reached the level of a global health emergency,” said Marc Keller, MD, of France’s La Ligue nationale contre le cancer (member of ALIAM, the Alliance of Francophone African and Mediterranean NGOs for cancer control), which supports cancer research, awareness and prevention. “Decreasing cancer incidence and improving cancer survival rates in rich countries contrast sharply with rapidly growing cancer epidemics that go undiagnosed and untreated in many poorer nations.”

“Cancer in developing countries is a looming public health crisis,” said Doug Ulman, president and CEO of the U.S.-based Lance Armstrong Foundation, whose LIVE**STRONG**® Global Cancer Campaign seeks to urgently address the burden of cancer worldwide and support the 28 million people living with cancer around the globe. “Addressing this crisis requires a global

movement to fight cancer-related stigma and discrimination, reduce cancer risk, promote education of both patients and health care providers, and increase access to cancer diagnosis and treatment worldwide.”

Improving Access to Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment

Efforts to increase access to diagnosis and treatment for cancer in developing countries are advancing on two fronts, according to Joseph Saba, MD, CEO of Axios, a consultancy and Foundation that has provided therapies for chronic, life-threatening diseases to more than 8 million people worldwide. Some initiatives are underway to promote low-cost, low technology methods to increase early diagnosis of some cancers, which increases the effectiveness and lowers the cost of treatment. At the same time, a small number of leaders of the pharmaceutical sector have also embarked on efforts to make cancer-related therapies available in low- and middle-income countries. In both cases, Saba notes, progress is being made but considerably more action is needed to improve cancer survival rates in developing countries.

Low-cost, low technology approaches to cancer diagnosis include clinical examinations for breast cancer by trained healthcare providers and visual inspection for signs of cervical cancer using vinegar or Lugol iodine. Cervical cancer can also be treated, if detected early, through cryotherapy, a simple and inexpensive freezing procedure.

Among efforts currently underway to bring more advanced cancer therapies to people in need is the Sutent® Patient Assistance Program, which provides free or reduced-cost access to this Pfizer therapy for advanced kidney cancer and a cancer of the digestive system called gastrointestinal stromal tumor (GIST) to patients in need in developing countries. Another effort, the GARDASIL® Access Program, plans to make available at least 3 million doses of Merck’s GARDASIL [Human Papillomavirus Quadrivalent (Types 6, 11, 16, 18) Vaccine, Recombinant], to qualifying organizations and institutions in developing countries where approximately 80% of the world's cervical cancer cases occur.

“The key to improving access to advanced cancer therapies is the establishment of creative, long-term, sustainable access strategies,” noted Dr. Saba. “Charitable donations of cancer therapies are an important access tool, but developing sustainable solutions requires that pharmaceutical companies, national governments, NGOs and donors make long-term commitments to expand access to effective cancer care in developing countries.”

“National and global leadership is key to closing the global cancer gap,” added Dr Keller of La Ligue nationale contre le cancer. “Today, only 5% global cancer resources are spent in low-or middle-income countries and only 15% of countries in sub-Saharan Africa have cancer policies or plans.”

“Governments of the most-affected countries, donor nations, pharmaceutical companies and NGOs all have critical roles to play in reducing rapidly growing rates of cancer in developing countries,” said Doug Ulman of the Lance Armstrong Foundation. “World Cancer Day reminds us that we cannot claim real progress against this disease until we move to end the growing gap in cancer incidence and survival between rich and poor nations.”

About Axios

Axios delivers pioneering solutions that increase access to drugs, diagnostics, and healthcare services for cancer, HIV/AIDS, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases in developing countries through Axios International, which provides strategic support and technical assistance to improve healthcare delivery, and the Axios Foundation, which implements philanthropic healthcare programs. Axios works with in-country partners to build sustainable approaches to modernizing developing world healthcare infrastructure and systems. More than 8 million people have received tests or treatment through Axios' global network of more than 450 healthcare institutions in 117 countries. <http://www.axios-group.com>

About the Lance Armstrong Foundation

The Lance Armstrong Foundation fights for the 28 million people around the world living with cancer today. There can be – and should be – life after cancer for more people. That's why we kick in at the moment of diagnosis, giving people the resources and support they need to fight cancer head-on. We find innovative ways to raise awareness, fund research and end the stigma about cancer that many survivors face. We connect people and communities to drive social change, and we call for state, national and world leaders to help fight this disease. Anyone anywhere can join our fight against cancer. Join us at www.LIVESTRONG.org.

About La Ligue Nationale Contre le Cancer

La Ligue nationale contre le cancer (member of ALIAM, the Alliance of Francophone African and Mediterranean NGOs for cancer control) has more than 90 years experience, a base of 740 000 members and 13 000 volunteers in France dedicated to cancer research, cancer awareness, cancer prevention campaigns for the promotion of cancer screening and support of people with cancer and their families. The League has formed an alliance of African and Mediterranean anti-cancer associations working to improve information, training of medical professionals and to support people with cancer in developing countries. More information is available at: <http://www.ligue-cancer.net> and <http://www.aliam.org>

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