DAVID G. REICHERT
8TH DISTRICT, WASHINGTON

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRADE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
1730 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515–4708
TELEPHONE: (202) 225–7761
FAX: (202) 225–4282

DISTRICT OFFICE:
2737 78TH AVENUE, SE, SUITE 202
MERCER ISLAND, WA 98040
TELEPHONE: (206) 275–3438
TOLL FREE: (877) 920–9208
FAX: (206) 275–3437
www.house.gov/reichert

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–4708

Letter to NCI – Improve Outcomes for the Deadliest Cancers

Dear Colleague:

I respectfully ask that you join me in urging the National Cancer Institute (NCI) to consider new approaches to improve outcomes for the deadliest cancers.

Currently, the NCI approaches cancer research and treatment from a largely systematic perspective that looks at cancer in the broadest sense – focused on disease pathways. While it does continue to have some focus on research into specific organ sites, they are increasingly moving away from this approach. As a result, significant progress has been made to improve survival rates in some forms of cancer, like prostate cancer, for which the five-year survival rate is now nearly 100%, and the overall five-year survival rate for all forms of cancer has improved from 50% in the 1970s to 68% today. Unfortunately, this same progress has not been seen in another set of cancers that have yet to reach the 50% benchmark.

Pancreatic cancer is, unfortunately, a good example of a cancer in which little progress has been made to improve survival rates. The five-year survival rate was 2% in the 1970s and is still in the single-digits today at a mere 6%. In fact, it is the only top ten cancer killer with a five-year survival rate still in the single digits. In addition, there are other deadly cancers that still have woefully low five-year survival rates, such as ovarian, brain, myeloma, stomach, esophageal, lung and liver cancers. At present, the NCI does not appear to have a specific plan to address cancers that continue to have such low survival rates and there is concern in the scientific community that increasingly moving towards largely a systematic approach could further impact on research into these cancers.

Pancreatic cancer and many of the deadliest cancers are some of the most biologically complex cancers. They are our biggest research challenges. A variety of approaches at the NCI should be considered to address these challenges. While the systematic approach employed at NCI could be beneficial, particularly with respect to answering some remaining questions about breast and prostate cancers, it also has the possibility of leaving the deadliest cancers farther behind. I ask you to join me in simply urging the NCI to consider developing a range of approaches, including a targeted approach for the deadliest and most difficult to study cancers. I hope that as a fellow advocate for medical research, you will join me in my efforts to shed light on this issue.

The text of the letter is enclosed. To sign on, or should you have any questions, please contact Michelle Brenan in my office at 202-225-7761 or michelle.brenan@mail.house.gov. The letter will close **COB Thursday, July 29.**

Sincerely,

Dave Reichert
Member of Congress

Dear Dr. Varmus:

As you assume the directorship of the National Cancer Institute (NCI), we urge you to consider new approaches in the way NCI addresses the deadliest cancers, defined as those with five-year survival rates below 50%.

We understand that the NCI's current approach to cancer research is largely systematic – to focus on disease pathways instead of focusing on specific organs. While we do not dispute that this approach is valuable, we urge you to consider additional approaches that allow for more focus on the cancers in which the least progress has been seen to improve survival rates.

Pancreatic cancer, as you know, is one of the most biologically complex cancers and remains one of our most significant challenges. While overall five-year cancer survival rates have improved from 50% to 68% in the last 40 years, the five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer has remained in the single digits. In fact, of the more than 42,000 individuals who will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer this year, 75% will die within a year of their diagnosis and 94 percent will die within 5 years. In addition, there are other deadly cancers that still have woefully low five-year survival rates, such as ovarian, brain, myeloma, stomach, esophageal, lung and liver cancers.

NCI-supported research contributes greatly to the significant increase in survival rates among certain cancers. We are committed advocates for medical research, and believe that the NCI needs adequate resources to develop new diagnostic tools and therapies and vastly improve survival rates. However, given the lack of progress to date in improving survival rates for the deadliest cancers, we believe that pancreatic cancer and the other deadliest cancers warrant special attention, and urge you to consider developing and managing a comprehensive and targeted initiative to promote basic research that can improve outcomes for those suffering from the deadliest cancers, just as we have for other cancers.

Our shared goal is to facilitate – not impede – scientific progress that will achieve the best outcomes and shed light on the cancers that remain our most significant challenges.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,