



## CAP Lung Cancer Medical Writers' Circle

### **The Truth about Lung Cancer- a Surgeon's Perspective and Commentary**

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We all know the statistics. Lung cancer is a devastating illness which affects men and women, spouses and children. We already know that lung cancer is the number one cause of death from cancer each year in men and women. We already know that lung cancer causes more deaths than the next five most common cancers combined! But, what you didn't know is that we have NOT improved survival in lung cancer in the last 70 years. Lung cancer survival rates are no better today 2011 than they were in the 1930's! Only pancreatic cancer, another equally as deadly malignancy, can claim such a high death toll. You're asking why, how can this be? How can such a devastating illness like lung cancer receive such little attention and so few research dollars? Why is it that 85% of lung cancer cases are diagnosed in late stages with no chance for cure?

Lung cancer is not a pretty disease. Once diagnosed, patients are stigmatized: "I told him not to smoke", "she did it to herself" etc. These are just a few of the comments that patient's hear from friends and "loved ones". No famous actors or Hollywood starlets will ever campaign against smoking or assist in lung cancer prevention. There are no marches on Washington, pink ribbons on lapels, or yellow wrist bands to wear. Lung cancer is not talked about. Research dollars for lung cancer prevention are minimal because you and everyone else know that 99% of lung cancers are caused by cigarettes. Why spend research money when you already know what causes lung cancer? Now, you understand the dilemma of the disease.

The government and your doctor have not told you that there is a 90% cure rate if a lung cancer is picked up early (Stage I). How can you be one of the lucky ones in this 90% survival group? Get a CT scan of your chest. Thoracic surgeons will not operate on a lung cancer patient without a CT scan- we know this study gives the most bang for the buck. Only now are studies being published showing that low dose CT scans pick up lung cancers much earlier and allow earlier intervention with curative intent. Why would anyone not demand a CT scan? The radiation risks are minimal; the study is quick, painless, and non-invasive—please, please, please, get a CT scan of your chest. If you smoked, or if you lived with a smoker, or if you have a family history of lung cancer, get a CT scan. This one test may save your life by allowing early intervention. If picked up early enough, lung cancer can be beaten. But remember, if you wait until symptoms appear, like cough, chest pain, or shortness of breath, you may be playing Russian roulette.