

A Letter to Breast Cancer Clinicians and Researchers from NBCC

2020

In September, the National Breast Cancer Coalition (NBCC) declared a deadline to end breast cancer—January 1, 2020. Ending breast cancer is not a new idea for us. Our mission for almost 20 years has been the eradication of breast cancer. Over the past two decades we successfully fought for increased federal funding for the scientific community, collaborated with researchers to move ideas forward and launched new models for training advocates in research methodology and science. Working together with you, we made a difference.

We appreciate the scientific progress that has been made during this time. We know much more about the biology of breast cancer, and strides have been made in many areas of technology such as genomics and nanotechnology that could impact diagnosis and treatment of disease. We have moved toward a world of targeted, less toxic treatments.

And yet, with all of this, progress in the clinic has been incremental. The advances in knowledge and new scientific tools have not been translated quickly, if at all, into progress for women with or at risk for breast cancer.

We've listened to scientists and clinicians over the years who share our frustrations. They have told us that they too are dissatisfied with the status quo, that the current system of research often stymies innovation. They are impatient with the bureaucracy of funding and clinical trials that allows so many bench discoveries to languish before ever making it to the clinic, or prevents new ideas from ever being funded.

We asked what we could do to change the system. We have already brought billions of new dollars to science, fostered a new appreciation within the public for research and created innovative collaborations between advocates and scientists. How do we harness the significant discoveries that have already been made and help facilitate the work of those who are dedicated to doing innovative and clinically meaningful research? How do we shift the focus of resources, institutions and scientists to the work that will have the most impact on ending this disease?

After much thought and debate, we chose to set a deadline. We know that setting a deadline alone won't end breast cancer, but we believe a change in focus will. Setting the deadline is a tool to change the focus over the next ten years; to change how all of us view our work in breast cancer and how we do it. To bring back a sense of urgency to breast cancer. Business as usual is not working for women. And very often we hear that it is not working for you. A deadline will help us all reset the course.

But we haven't just set a deadline; we have also developed a strategic plan to engage all of the stakeholders around it. Scientists, regulators, industry representatives, advocates and all who care have been and will continue to be involved in the plan. This includes meetings focused on specific areas that will be crucial to achieving the deadline. The emphasis is on removing barriers and encouraging collaboration, and shifting the focus away from publications, patents and drug development to interventions that can have a dramatic impact for women.

We invite you to join us. Be a part of this, even if you are skeptical. We need your skepticism to help us identify the barriers to achieving the end of breast cancer and your help in overcoming them.

NBCC advocates believe we will eradicate breast cancer by focusing and aggregating efforts in two key areas: learning how to stop breast cancer metastasis from taking women's lives and learning how to prevent the disease from developing. Both of these strategies will require innovations in the system to allow high-quality scientific evaluation of new interventions in a rapid manner.

NBCC will be hosting strategic summits, catalytic workshops and collaborative efforts with a multi-disciplinary and diverse group of stakeholders to focus on these key areas. A summit on metastasis is being planned for August 2011, and a summit on prevention is planned for October 2011. The goal of these summits is to identify the most promising areas of research, those areas which could have a significant impact on the incidence or mortality of the disease in the context of the deadline. Catalytic workshops will be held around the most promising areas of research in 2012 and beyond. The activities and progress will be tracked and summarized in annual reports issued by NBCC.

NBCC has already begun to hold a series of catalytic workshops on the development of a prophylactic breast cancer vaccine. As a result, the *Artemis Project* has been launched to develop and implement a five-year strategic plan for a preventive vaccine. This project is being led by advocates and includes several researchers from different institutions including Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center, City of Hope Beckman Research Institute, University of California Los Angeles, and the Stanford University School of Medicine, among others.

Imagine, just for a moment, that we all collaborated and that we met the deadline. How do you envision that we got there? What barriers did we remove? What did we change? We want to hear from you.

We can keep on doing what we are doing, and I think we can guess where we will be on January 1, 2020. Or we can declare a deadline and bring back that sense of urgency and the catalyst we need for change. We chose to declare a deadline. Are you with us?