

Arsht Research on Ethics and Community Grant

Does Lung Cancer Deserve Less Attention than Other Types of Cancers? Ethical Issues Surrounding Cancer Research Funding Disparities

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Faculty: Michael Slote, Ph.D.

Student: Aaron Wilson

College of Arts and Sciences

Abstract

Lung cancer kills more people per year than any other cancer, claiming the lives of almost twice as many women as breast cancer and nearly three times as many men as prostate cancer. Despite these numbers, annual research funding remains significantly lower for lung cancer, averaging under \$2,000 per lung cancer death, compared to \$15,000 per prostate cancer death and \$24,000 per breast cancer death. Can such inequalities in research funding be ethically justified? I examine two general arguments in favor of these funding disparities. The first is founded on the misperception of lung cancer as punishment for smoking. Lung cancer deserves less funding because it is a self-inflicted disease, unlike breast cancer. I call this the Retributionist Argument. The second is based on the claim that certain cancers, such as lung cancer, simply have less hope for a cure. Hence, more good can be done by allocating available resources to research into more treatable types of cancers. I call this the Consequentialist Argument. I will attempt to show that both of these arguments are unsound and that such research funding inequalities remain ethically unsupported.

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