

Dear Reader,

This special edition of *South Dakota Medicine* is devoted to the four major cancers that affect South Dakotans and the U.S. population: breast, colorectal, lung and prostate.

The issue begins with a discussion of the epidemiology of these cancers in South Dakota and the impact they have on the citizens of our state. This is followed by a timely piece on the heritability of these cancers and the importance of obtaining a good family history. This article also highlights the advantage of having genetic counselors available to obtain a detailed pedigree, as well as counsel the patient on the genetics of these diseases. Genetic counselors recently received licensure by the state of South Dakota and join our team in the fight against the four major cancers. The next series of manuscripts are devoted to screening, diagnosis and treatment of breast, prostate, colon and lung cancer. An article on the impact genomics may have on the diagnosis and treatment of breast and prostate cancer follows. The explosion of information, which has followed mapping of the human genome, has the potential for allowing early diagnosis and individualized treatment of cancer depending on the cancer genotype. The final article discusses the South Dakota Cancer Registry and its importance for the people of South Dakota.

The rural, even frontier, nature of much of South Dakota makes screening, diagnosing, treating and following patients for cancer particularly challenging. Using the consensus definition of frontier (based on persons per square mile, distance in miles and minutes to a service/market area), 54 of South Dakota's 66 counties were designated as frontier at the time of the last U.S. census.<sup>1</sup> Many patients have to travel long distances for health care, and this reality is a potential barrier to cancer screening and management in our most rural areas.

Another crucial challenge to our health care system, and the subject of extensive and often heated debate in our nation over the last year, is how best to address the crucial problem of many Americans having no health insurance or being underinsured. This has obvious implications with regard to cancer screening and treatment.

The South Dakota Department of Health has launched innovative programs to improve screening and treatment of cancer for South Dakotans. An example is the "All Women Count Program," which makes mammograms and Pap screenings available to eligible women at no cost in many doctors' offices and health clinics. The South Dakota Cancer Registry (SDCR) is an important repository of data on cancer incidence and mortality. Beginning as a limited data collection system in 1992, a law passed in 2005 requires "reporting by all entities detecting, diagnosing and treating cancer cases in South Dakota." The SDCR is a part of the National Program of Cancer Registries administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which assures registries meet national standards.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, we had a fantastic response to our call for manuscript submissions – so much that we had to hold some manuscripts for publishing in later monthly issues of the journal. We thank our authors for their work and hope you enjoy the third special edition of *South Dakota Medicine* on the four major cancers. May you find it to be a helpful resource for your practice.



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#### REFERENCES

1. Olson DP. South Dakota's frontier counties: differing definitions. Rural Life Census Data Center (<http://sdrurallife.sdstate.edu>). South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD.
2. South Dakota Cancer Registry. Available from: <http://doh.sd.gov/Services.aspx> (Accessed 2/22/10).