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Nation-leading OSU cancer researchers worry: will Biden's moonshot continue?

By [Chris Edwards](#), [Patricia Berg](#) and [Robert Weiner](#): June 26, 2018

The Ohio State University has some of the country's top leaders in cancer research. Dr. Elaine Mardis is President-Elect for the American Association for Cancer Research for 2018-2019, co-executive director of the Institute for Genomic Medicine at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, and professor of pediatrics at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. Dr. Mike Caligiuri led the James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute at The Ohio State University, has been President of AACR for 2017-2018, and is currently president of City of Hope National Medical Center.

Cancer research received an uptick in funding of \$2.5 billion dollars since 2016. However, the President, chastened by conservatives, said he would "never again" sign appropriations like this year's and has now proposed "rescissions"—cuts after the fact—to the recently passed bill by roughly \$15 billion in domestic programs. The fight remains on.

The spike upward is largely a result of former Vice President Joe Biden's Moonshot Initiative. Announced in 2016 during former President Obama's final State of the Union, the legislation promised to "make America the country that cures cancer once and for all." Biden's Moonshot increased funding by \$1.8 billion under the 21st Century Cures bill, and Congress increased it further by \$775 million.

This recent interest is also thanks to the efforts of Columbus patient Grant Reed. According to the Columbus Dispatch, doctors at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus told Reed in 2012, then 11 years old, that he had brain cancer. In 2016 at 15 years old, after having beaten two bouts of the cancer, Reed went to Washington to lobby congressmen from his state for more funding for research.

Last year, 1,688,780 men and women were newly diagnosed with cancer in the United States. According to an October 2017 survey by the American Society of Clinical Oncology, 63 percent of Americans fear being diagnosed with the disease. Breast cancer is the type of cancer women fear getting the most. Last year, 252,710 women were diagnosed with breast cancer in the US, and 40,610 women died from it. Also in 2017, 600,920 men and women died from some cancer.

In Ohio alone, last year 68,180 men and women received a cancer diagnosis and 25,430 men and women died from the disease. 9,430 women in Ohio were diagnosed with breast cancer, and 1,690 women in the state with breast cancer died in 2017.

Despite these large numbers, the mortality rate for cancer diagnoses has decreased overall by 26 percent since it was at its height in the '90s, the American Cancer Society says. In March of this year, President Trump signed the Fiscal Year 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act. After attempting to cut cancer funding, the Trump administration reversed, forced by Congress. Congress agreed to give the National Institutes of Health an additional \$2 billion, with \$476 million of those funds going towards the National Cancer Institute.

Those are the facts. Cancer is serious, deadly and widespread. However, Ohio's national research leaders fear that without perseverance, funding could go back to stalemates and decreases. Mardis told us in an interview, "Research must go on for breakthroughs to happen."

"There is not just one cancer, there are 200 cancers. It's really a matter of threading the needle. The 200 cancers means there are a variety of markers that are tissue specific," Mardis said. She said she was concerned both with "false positives, which are the hardest to detect," and with Congress' recent talk about "recessions" – cuts in money already approved.

Dr. Norman Sharpless, the Director of the National Cancer Institute, told the April AACR National convention that he was grateful for the "new money to NCI in the Omnibus bill." Sharpless noted that African Americans have a 25 percent worse outcome from breast and prostate cancer, but there remains "a barrier in consent" to research: the result of the infamous Tuskegee Study of 1932. This study was aimed at treating syphilis in black men, but the 600 participants were misled about the study's true purpose and never received treatment for the disease.

Mardis urges people to take their health seriously personally with "a simple blood test and early screening." As for the field as a whole, it must work on "termination of risk factors and known mutations." Mardis believes that there will be "support for cancer research, not drastic cuts." Sharpless called for an increase in grants, saying he wants them to increase to 25% over five years and make many five year grants into seven year grants "to accelerate our enormous progress to every patient."

Caligiuri felt confident that the funding for cancer research would remain constant. He believes that "Trump won't touch cancer, everyone's for it. The president proposes cuts, but Congress decides."

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