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New tool in fight against lung cancer

Whether they know it yet or not, countless numbers of Illinois residents have just been given a powerful weapon in the fight of their lives. On Aug. 27, state Sen. John Cullerton, D-Chicago, state Sen. Kwame Raoul, D-Chicago, and state Rep. Fred Crespo, D-Hoffman Estates, championed and ultimately won passage of Illinois Senate Bill 796, which created the landmark lung cancer research fund. This vital legislation will allow Illinois residents to allocate a portion of their 2007 state income tax to lung cancer research simply by checking a box on their tax return.

Some may ask, "What's so important about the lung cancer research fund?" Its significance lies in its potential to advance cutting-edge research for the most lethal form of cancer, which this year alone will claim over 150,000 lives in the United States. Four years ago, it claimed the life of my energetic and brave father within a period of just 10 months. Often perceived and shunned as a smoker's disease, lung cancer is being increasingly diagnosed at alarming rates in non-smokers and former smokers, especially among women.

Despite the grave statistics surrounding lung cancer -- it kills more Americans every year than breast, prostate and colorectal cancers combined; and 85 percent of those diagnosed with the disease will die within five years without new treatment methods -- the federal government spent just over \$1,800 on research per lung cancer death in 2005. By comparison, the federal government spent \$23,400 for each breast cancer death and \$14,300 for each prostate cancer death. Making matters worse, lung cancer is often caught so late that there is a short window of time for effective treatment.

Beginning this year, every Illinois taxpayer will have the power to help turn the tide against lung cancer. With the lung cancer research fund, broadminded legislators, volunteer advocates, and organizations such as the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago, have taken a big step forward in erasing the unfortunate stigma often associated with this silent killer.

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