In a Historic First, The Lancet Oncology Endorses Joe Biden

The usually apolitical medical journal cites the former vice president's longstanding support for cancer research.

October 5, 2020 By Caroline Tien

For the first time in its 20-year history, the highly regarded medical journal The Lancet Oncology has endorsed a U.S. presidential candidate. In an article published in the October 1 issue, the editorial board wrote that it has thrown its support behind Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden because he is "the only candidate to see the importance of health care as a human right that enhances society, rather than another business opportunity to enrich a small minority."

Biden's longstanding advocacy for cancer research and care played a significant role in The Lancet Oncology's decision to endorse him over Republican incumbent Donald Trump. Coming six and a half months after COVID-19 cases began cropping up in earnest, the outcome of the election will have uniquely significant consequences for the state of cancer care as well as health care more broadly in the United States.

While Trump has expanded telemedicine and pledged $500 million to pediatric cancer research, according to the journal, "[his] actions" with regard to science and health care "have largely been troubling." For one, he has repeatedly attempted to dismantle the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare, which provides millions of poor Americans with health insurance; for another, he has attempted to cut funding to and otherwise disempower federal agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

By contrast, Biden has vowed to protect the ACA, expand Medicaid and Medicare, reduce the cost of prescription drugs and fund cancer research—a cause particularly near and dear to his heart for personal rather than professional reasons. Both the former vice president and his running mate, Senator Kamala Harris (D–Calif.), have lost loved ones to cancer.

Biden's son Beau died at age 46 in 2015 of glioblastoma, a form of brain cancer. Harris's mother, Shyamala Gopalan, a noted cancer researcher, died at age 70 in 2009 of colon cancer. "She was my inspiration and dedicated her life to finding a cure for breast cancer," Harris wrote on Twitter on February 4, World Cancer Day. "I will always fight for public funding for cancer research—too many lives have been cut short."

In and out of public office, The Lancet Oncology noted, Biden has made his commitment to cancer research clear many times over. In 2016, he headed the Cancer Moonshot, a federal program developed to accelerate progress in cancer prevention, detection, diagnosis and treatment. In 2017, he and his wife, Jill, established the Biden Cancer Initiative, a nonprofit offshoot of the Cancer Moonshot; it was shuttered in 2019 when Biden announced his candidacy. On the campaign trail earlier this year, he even promised to "cure cancer," a claim that oncologists greeted with skepticism.

In closing, The Lancet Oncology called on Biden to follow through on his support for cancer research if elected.

"The NCI has published their proposed budget for the 2022 fiscal year, including a funding increase of $1,170 million, plus an additional $194 million for the Cancer Moonshot, with plans to address cancer treatment resistance, obesity and survivorship," The Lancet Oncology wrote. "Whether these laudable aims come to fruition will depend not only on the outcome of the 2020 presidential election but also on a Biden administration honoring its campaign promises with vigor and dedication."

To read about how Trump's record on cancer research compares to that of previous presidents, click here. And to read more about the intersection of politics and health care, click here.

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