Echoes of the Cave Rescue

It struck me how similar the story of the Thailand cave rescue is to the work of cancer researchers around the globe.

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By Lorraine Egan, president and CEO of Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation

I have been obsessed with the story of the Thailand cave rescue. It spoke to me on so many levels, especially in this time of political animus, global conflict, and the constant barrage of dire news reports. The rescue was the ultimate story of humanity: people from across the globe working together with passion and relentlessness, undertaking enormous technical and logistical challenges, and refusing to give up on the goal of saving lives. Then it struck me how similar this story is to the work of cancer researchers around the globe. They, too are committed to saving lives. But there are several other striking similarities:

- At the Thai cave rescue, hundreds worked together as an efficient and effective team to get the boys out. Scientists also work in teams in their pursuit of a cure. Many think that scientists work in silos, unwilling to collaborate with their peers. Not so. Each lab is an ecosystem of scientists pursuing breakthroughs. Moreover, most science today bridges labs, research institutions and often the globe because the complexity of human biology and cancer requires multidisciplinary teams of diverse experts.

- The rescuers innovated to get the team out, developing and testing an intricate, multi-step plan. When there wasn't an obvious solution, they made one up. The same is true in cancer research. To identify new ways to cure cancer, scientists are constantly pushing the outer limits of technology and developing new solutions and approaches. In recent years alone, we have seen the development of immunotherapies and other therapies that are saving lives today.

- They benefitted from luck. As stated by one of the leaders of the rescue, "The most important

> piece of the rescue was good luck." Serendipity plays a role in research as well. Experiments often turn out differently than expected or a surprise observation is made. Capitalizing on luck is the hallmark of many scientific breakthroughs. As Louis Pasteur once famously said, "Chance favors the prepared mind."

So, as I celebrate the success of the Thailand cave rescue, I am also celebrating the human qualities that assure me that the dedication and bravery of teams of scientists across the globe will ultimately rescue all of us from cancer as well.

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