# Have You Hugged a Scientist Today?

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

If you are like most people, you don't come across scientists in your daily life and would have trouble naming a famous living scientist now that Stephen Hawking has passed away. Don't feel bad if this is true, since, according to a survey by Research!America, 84 percent of Americans can't name a living scientist. But be thankful that they are out there, because each of us benefits from scientific research every day.

Depending on your age, you may actually be alive today as a result of science. During the 20th century, the average life span increased from less than 50 years to nearly 80—all thanks to scientists who developed ways to prevent and cure many of the most deadly diseases of that time, such as polio, smallpox, infections, influenza, and tuberculosis. Every time we visit a doctor today, we are benefiting from tools developed by countless scientists, from vaccines that prevent disease, to diagnostics that identify the illnesses we have, to the treatments that hopefully cure us.

The future is equally promising. I have no doubt that brilliant and driven scientists will find cures for the devastating diseases we currently face. In my own world of cancer research, for example, cancer death rates have dropped 25 percent since 1991 thanks to scientific advances, saving 2.4 million lives. There are some cancer patients being cured today with drugs that specifically target the genetic processes that go awry in cancer cells or with immunotherapies that harness their own immune systems to attack those cells. These powerful therapies did not exist even a decade ago. There is much work to be done, but progress is accelerating at a rapid rate.

Breakthroughs in science have two essential ingredients: brilliant scientists and money to support their highly technology-driven and increasingly expensive work. We all need to advocate for both. Most importantly, we need to steadfastly ensure that the federal government maintains its commitment to funding biomedical research. The good news is that the 2018 federal budget approved recently increased support for the National Institutes of Health and other federal agencies that fund biomedical research, a true bipartisan success story! We need to keep the momentum going.

There are lots of ways you can help by offering your voice, time and funds. Let your representatives in Congress know that funding scientific research is important to you. Participate in a race or walk to support research on a disease that has affected you or your loved ones.

Donate to an organization that is committed to finding cures. May is National Cancer Research Month, a great time to show your support for research on a disease that unfortunately touches all of us.

And, if you meet a scientist, take a moment to shake their hand and thank them for what they do. You will be surprised how much they appreciate it.

Or you can hug them.

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