**Remarks on Cancer Day**

**By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA**

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Today we pause to reflect on one of the ravages of mankind – cancer.

Under the theme We can. I can. the world marks World Cancer Day, which was established by the Paris Charter adopted at the World Summit against Cancer for the New Millennium in Paris on 4 February, 2000.

The charter’s mission is to promote the research for curing as well as preventing the disease, upgrading the provided services to patients, the sensitization of the common opinion and the mobilization of the global community against cancer.

Unfortunately, cancer is nothing new to the Cayman Islands. We have all seen its ill effects on members of our own families, our friends, co-workers and acquaintances. Even some of us have had to personally deal with the various stages of the illness. And helping us locally are the Cayman Islands Cancer Society and Hospice Care to which we owe a great deal of gratitude.

Globally, the world cancer burden is expected to increase to 21.7 million cases and 13 million deaths by the year 2030. According to the World Health Organization, the toll of cancer and other chronic diseases is greater in low and middle income countries where people develop chronic diseases at younger ages, suffer longer and die sooner.

Cancer can be a horrible disease, but there is good news.

According the American Cancer Society, only a few decades ago the outlook for people facing cancer was not nearly as good as it is today. During the 1970s about one of two people diagnosed with cancer survived at least five years. Now, more than two of three survive that long. It is estimated that there are more than 14 million cancer survivors in the United States alone. That figure is estimated to increase to 19 million by the year 2024.

Here in Cayman most of us know people who have survived the ravages of cancer.

But surviving cancer is not for the timid.

That’s one of the reasons it is important that we all take measures to reduce the impact that cancer has on individuals, families and communities.

World Cancer Day gives us a chance to reflect on what we can do in the fight against cancer.

Alcohol and tobacco use are the usual culprits of cancer, but obesity, lack physical activity and poor diet are also risk factors for cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, one third of cancer causes in the United States are related to being overweight, obesity, lack of physical activity and poor nutrition.

We have nutrition issues here at home too. Unlike our forefathers, we have become a sedentary society and as such cannot continue to eat the heavy starches and breadkind that is so ingrained in our diets. Our forefathers worked the sea and the land. Most of us sit behind desks and the only physical activity we do is going from the office to the car.

So there are steps we can take individually and together to help ward off cancer risks. We can also avail ourselves of myriad cancer screenings available at our private and public hospitals and clinics.

Fortunately cancer is no longer a dirty word. Today it is something we can talk about openly. Thank goodness the view that cancer cannot be cured and the fears that were once associated with the disease are changing.

So today, remember the theme of World Cancer Day, We can. I can. Because together we can learn how to prevent cancer risks and hopefully one day find a cure.

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