

# BUSINESS REPORT

## What Cancer Alley?

*Health officials say figures disprove Cancer Alley myth.*

By KELLY KING ALEXANDER

Last month when President Clinton addressed on national television a 12-year-old Louisiana boy's concern about his brother's death from cancer, which the youngster believed was caused by pollution from nearby industry, emotions ran high.

When members of the Louisiana Cancer Coalition heard the president's response—he said it was his understanding that South Louisiana has one of the highest rates of cancer in the nation—emotions ran higher still.

"That was totally incorrect, and that does nothing for the citizens of this state or the rest of the country," said Jan Kasofsky, president of the Louisiana Cancer Coalition. Dr. Larry Hebert, another coalition member and director of the state Office of Public Health, added, "If you look at all the information we have, there is no such thing as Cancer Alley."

Following the television program, Gov. Edwards issued a letter to the president lamenting that "misinformation and imprecise statements have come to characterize discussions of health in Louisiana."

The Louisiana Cancer Coalition plans to change that. Founded two



Dr. Jan Kasofsky

years ago, the coalition is comprised of 65 member groups who've banded together to work toward cancer control and education. The group cites information from the Louisiana Tumor Registry and a 1991 Louisiana Medical Center Study that revealed that South Louisiana residents are not more likely to contract cancer than residents from any other region of the country, but are more likely to die from the disease once they get it.

"There are a lot of myths in Louisiana, that the frequency of cancer in

Louisiana is much higher than in the nation. It is not," said Dr. Hebert. "Mortality is high, but incidence is not."

Among the factors believed to contribute to Louisiana's high cancer mortality rate are poor communities and families without health insurance, inadequate access to health care, and lack of early cancer detection, according to the group.

Coalition members, which include the Louisiana Cancer & Lung Trust Fund Board, the Louisiana Tumor Registry, the Louisiana Oncology Society, the Louisiana Cancer Consortium, the Louisiana Coalition on Smoking and Health and the state chapters of the American Cancer Society and the American College of Surgeons' Committee on Cancer, believe their collaborative efforts can improve the mortality figures.

Most of the members are health care groups, including hospitals and physicians, said Ms. Kasofsky, but the coalition also includes insurance companies, academics and business groups. "There's interest by business and industry to correct the misperception that we live in a cancer alley," said Ms. Kasofsky. "The press a

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