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Kill Infection, Prevent Cancer

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Hello. I'm Dr. Maurie Markman from Cancer Treatment Centers of America in Philadelphia. I wanted to briefly discuss a very interesting -- and what I believe to be a very important -- paper that appeared in a recent issue of Lancet Oncology.[1]

The paper, entitled "Global Burden of Cancers Attributable to Infections in 2008: A Review and Synthetic Analysis," was a rather comprehensive review of the 13 million new cases of cancer that occurred worldwide in 2008, with the specific idea of determining or estimating the percentage of these cases that might have been caused initially by viral infections, bacteria, or parasites. Of course, the major goal of such an effort would be to identify factors that, if treated successfully, could have prevented such cancers.

This review identified, in the opinion of the authors, approximately 2 million cases of cancers caused by these varieties of infections worldwide. As one might anticipate, in certain areas of the world, particularly the less developed areas, a higher percentage of cancer cases were felt to be attributable to such infections -- as many as a third. But even in North America, it was estimated that approximately 4% of cancers were caused by these infectious diseases. I think this is a very important paper. It is very well done and clearly identifies a very important public health issue.

Prevention of cancer is clearly a very cost-effective way of dealing with the enormous global burden that we see currently and are certainly going to see in the future. If cancers can be prevented by vaccination and by treatment of infectious diseases, this is a very important strategy. I think the paper that appeared in Lancet Oncology really addresses this question and should be read by oncologists, general physicians, and certainly those involved in making public-policy decisions regarding funding for cancer and cancer prevention. I encourage you to read this important paper.

Thank you for your attention.