

# Cancer death rates down

## ■ County rates still higher than state

By Dee Ann Campbell  
The Choctaw Sun

GILBERTOWN — The fight is on, and it seems to be working.

The battle against cancer seems to have taken a positive turn in the past three years, with both national and state death rates changing for the better. The American Cancer Society (ACS) announced recently that cancer deaths have declined in the United States for the second year in a row, and data from the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) reveals the same trend across the state.

According to the ACS, there were 3,014 fewer cancer deaths in 2004 than in 2003, a significantly larger decrease than the 369 fewer deaths reported the previous year. Thirteen years of continuing drops in the overall cancer death rate have now overtaken trends in aging and population growth, resulting in decreased numbers of deaths.

In Alabama, trends show a steady decline in the number of deaths due to cancer over the past few years. Although the numbers of cancer deaths actually rose in 2005, when the population growth is factored in, the numbers represent a decline in the rate of deaths in the state.

In 2004, there were 9,745 cancer-related deaths reported in Alabama, revealing a rate of 251 cancer deaths for every 100,000 Alabamians, according to the ADPH. The following year, the actual number rose to 9,854, but the numbers represented a rate of 216 per every 100,000 person.

### County cancer deaths

Thirty-four Choctaw Countians died from various types of cancer in 2004, including:

- Lung Cancer -- 9 deaths
- Lymphoid/blood-related -- 8 deaths.
- Prostate cancer -- 5 deaths
- Stomach cancer -- 4 deaths
- Breast cancer -- 2 deaths
- Bladder cancer -- 1 death

Although there has been a decline in cancer deaths in the state and in the nation, Choctaw Countians are still showing a relatively high rate of death due to the disease.

Of the 283 deaths in Choctaw County in 2004, 34 were cancer-related, revealing a rate of 223 per 100,000 — about 7 percentage points higher than the state rate.

Nine of those 34 deaths were attributed to lung cancer and eight were from lymphoid or blood-related cancers (like leukemia). Five Choctaw Countians died from prostate cancer, four from stomach cancer, two from breast cancer, and one from cancer of the bladder.

Only cardiovascular disease caused more deaths in the county in 2005 than did cancer.

White men were the segment of the county population that was most affected by terminal cancer in 2004. In fact, the number of cancers death among men in general was nearly twice that of women.

According to the

ADPH, 23 men died from cancer in Choctaw County, while only 11 women succumbed to the disease. Broken down by race, 18 of those men were white, and only 5 were black.

White Choctaw County women succumbed to cancer more often than did black women. Of the 11 women who died last year, 7 were white, and 4 were black.

**What's working?**  
The ACS, as well as other cancer research organization, credits several tools that have brought about the decline. Included in the list of tools are more funding for research, effective public health policies and public education, an increased public awareness for the need for early detection, and more effective medical treatments.

The tool that has perhaps been most effective is the dramatic increase in research for preventive measures, treatments, and cures. Funding for such research has been at an all-time high over the past few years, including governmental funding

and fund-raising efforts, like Relay for Life.

Choctaw County donors have played an important role in Relay's fund-raising efforts in Alabama in the past few years, raising more money through the project than any other county.

An emphasis on early detection has also been touted as one of the tools that has brought about the decline in cancer deaths. Substantial efforts have been made to reach population groups that have traditionally been less likely to get cancer screenings such as breast exams and pap smears.

Locally, groups like REACH 2010 and the Deep South Network for Cancer Control have actively promoted such screenings among African-Americans.

The ACS also credits stringent tobacco legislation for dropping the number of lung cancer deaths in the country over the past few years.

The recent good news may be threatened by cutbacks in funding for research and prevention programs. A few years after our nation doubled its investment in medical research, Congress cut cancer funding for the first time in more than a decade.

The ACS and other organization may be relying more and more on fund-raisers like Relay for Life to continue to good news in the fight against cancer. While the new statistics may be reason to celebrate, it may also be a reason to redouble ongoing efforts, because cancer remains the leading cause of death in Americans under age 85.

# Bunn is Employee of Month for February at Willow Trace NC

By Dee Ann Campbell  
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BUTLER — "I do my job to keep everything nice," says Carolyn Bunn of Lisman.

When family members come to visit their loved ones at Willow Trace Nursing Center, her work is one of the first things they notice. They notice how the facility smells, how its looks, and, most of all, they notice how clean their loved one's room is kept.

For the past year, Carolyn has been part of the housekeeping staff whose job is to see that the facility and the rooms remain clean enough for the most fastidious visitor. It is a job that she says gives her satisfaction from seeing her work produce a clean and pleasing environment for the residents.

"People come in and say, 'This is so nice,'" she says. "We like to hear that. We try to keep it that way."

A former staff member at Lafferty's Fine Dining in Butler, Carolyn took the job at Willow Trace when the diner closed last year. But it wasn't her first time to help keep the building clean.

"Back in high school, I worked in housekeeping when it was Choctaw General," she recalls. "It was a summer job."

Today, Carolyn works in rooms on several halls of the facility. Her work allows her to get to know the residents and to come to love them.

"They love to talk to me," she says. "You get to know them well, and



Choctaw Sun photo by Dee Ann Campbell  
Willow Trace's Employee of the Month for February, Carolyn Bunn, is a Lisman resident. She has one son Deldrick, a daughter-in-law Assia, and an 11-year-old granddaughter.

they'll speak to you when they see you in the halls. I like that."

While Carolyn is not involved in direct resident care, she says she realizes that, in many ways, her job is just as vital to the residents' well-being. And it is vital to how the public views the nursing home.

When she looks at her job with Willow Trace, Carolyn sees it as a mirror of life in general.

"It's like life," she explains. "You have to keep going and do your best at what you are given to do. That's the way I look at my job."

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