

March 2011

An open letter about Susan G. Komen for the Cure® and Planned Parenthood

This year, as in the past, Susan G. Komen for the Cure® is being criticized by some for funding a handful of women's health programs run by, or with ties to, Planned Parenthood. I'm writing this letter to explain our position and to correct any misinformation you may have heard about this subject.

Susan G. Komen for the Cure exists for only one reason: to save lives and to end breast cancer forever. In the past 29 years, we've invested more than **\$1.9 billion** to accomplish those goals through research and for programs that educate, screen and treat people in communities all around the world.

Early screening through mammograms and education is critical to end the suffering from this disease: 98 percent of women treated for early stage breast cancer, before it spreads, are alive five years later. The widespread use of mammography and heightened public awareness of breast cancer both contribute to these favorable statistics.

And while Komen Affiliates provide funds to pay for screening, education and treatment programs in dozens of communities, in some areas, the only place that poor, uninsured or under-insured women can receive these services are through programs run by Planned Parenthood.

These facilities serve rural women, poor women, Native American women, women of color, and the un- and under-insured. As part of our financial arrangements, we monitor our grantees twice a year to be sure they are spending the money in line with our agreements, and we are assured that Planned Parenthood uses these funds only for breast health education, screening and treatment programs.

As long as there is a need for health care for these women, Komen Affiliates will continue to fund the facilities that meet that need.

One year ago, two Catholic ethicists – Ron Hamel, Ph.D. and Michael Panicola, Ph.D. – examined the moral implications of our funding decision. They concluded that it was morally permissible for the church to be involved with Komen in light of its funding agreements with Planned Parenthood.

"The fact that some Komen affiliates, at times, provide funding to Planned Parenthood specifically and solely for breast health services cannot on the face of it be construed as wrongdoing," the ethicists wrote. "The good that Komen does and the harm that would come to so many women if Komen ceased to exist or ceased to be funded would seem to be a sufficiently proportionate reason" for Catholics to support our funding decisions (emphasis added).

Another piece of misinformation being spread by many who criticize Komen for the Cure for its Planned Parenthood grants is that abortion causes breast cancer. Well-conducted research consistently fails to support this claim. We agree with the bulk of scientific evidence – from the National Cancer Institute, Harvard, a rigorous study in Denmark and from Oxford University – that there is no conclusive link between breast cancer and induced abortion or miscarriage.

It is important for women to receive accurate information about risk factors for breast cancer. There are steps a woman can take to reduce her risk of developing breast cancer (for example, maintaining a healthy weight) as well as important steps every woman should take to make sure that, if she does develop breast cancer, it is detected and treated as soon as possible. A complete list of risk factors and screening recommendations can be found on our website www.komen.org.

More detailed information is on our website at www.komen.org. We invite you to review the documents there, and we thank you again for taking time to investigate our position on this issue.