



What Happened To Phase II of GCSAA Cancer Study?

By Monroe S. Miller

The "C" word scares absolutely everyone, me included. Maybe me especially.

Within less than the past year, I have had two skin cancers removed, as did a friend of mine at the club and a colleague I am close to. Catherine Smejkal, whom we all will miss seeing at the Noer Research Facility, passed away very quickly from a rapidly spreading cancer. And this spring our family buried my first cousin who died from a malignant brain tumor.

Many golf course superintendents can count similar experiences with their friends and family and colleagues. It is no wonder I started to think, again, of the GCSAA mortality study that was initiated a number of years ago. The Phase I results were announced by Dr. Burton Kross at the GCSAA conference and show in Dallas in 1994.

Dr. Kross was an excellent choice for the project. He is an University of Iowa professor of preventative medicine and mental health and has experience with Iowa farmers and their health issues.

The mortality study raised questions and heightened concerns. Of the 618 deaths of golf course superintendents Dr. Kross studied (deaths that occurred between 1970 and 1992), 179 were cancer related. According to the study, we are 79% more likely to contract large intestinal cancer and 36% more likely to contract lung cancer than the general public. The study also found above average rates of brain cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, pancreatic and prostate cancer.

You would have to be totally ignorant not to be concerned. That is why some were surprised that there was a fair amount of ceremony when the results were released in Dallas. It might have been better to have quietly informed the membership of the results to date and quickly started on Phase II. Nearly anyone could have predicted that before we were in the air on the way home from the Dallas conference Paul Harvey was on the air with "the rest of the story" about golf courses, golf and pesticides. It was, in my view, a nightmare that to some extent was GCSAA's own doing.

But that is history. What matters to me and should matter to all golf course superintendents is the status of Phase II of the mortality study. We need to know more about our risk of cancer that is job related.

Phase II was supposed to see development of a no smoking program (redundant in today's anti-smoking climate; you practically cannot eat a meal and smoke in Madison, for example), "an expansion of current education and training programs" (I'm not sure what that means, nor have I heard about them or their status or their state of expansion), and, most importantly, completion of the statistical mortality study to put the University

of Iowa's preliminary data into a more relevant and meaningful context so that we know if, in plain language, we are more likely to get cancer because we are golf course superintendents.

Simply stated, we need to see the status of Dr. Kross' Phase II study to date, and gain a sense of where this second round of cancer questions is heading. Who among us doesn't want to know if our careers are making us more susceptible to an early death because of cancer? These data do not need to be released to the world, complete with banners and bunting and bullfeathers. We need a simple report to tell us how the study results are shaping up, sans any PR.

I might add that I called GCSAA headquarters with this question a number of months ago. The staff person I talked with should have known all about Phase II, but said he was uninvolved. He assured me he would have the right person with the answers contact me. That has never happened.

I am hoping for two things: 1) that the answers are forthcoming and, 2) the results of Dr. Kross' study are heartening.

It also occurred to me that if Bruce Williams' message *A Growing Trust* from the May 1996 issue of GCM is indeed reality, then I can trust someone in GCSAA to tell us what we need to know, what we were told we could expect to know, and what some paid to find out (remember that \$10,000 the WGCSA donated to the mortality study?). Who knows? Some GCSAA members' lives may actually depend on it. ♣

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