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## DAILY NEWS

### **Why U.S. gives hope to breast cancer patients: Innovation, which is costly, improves survival rates**

By Betsy Mccaughey

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Breast Cancer Awareness Month is here again, and this year it's being used to promote a national health care overhaul. If cancer runs in your family, this political propaganda could be dangerous to your health.

First Lady Michelle Obama stood with breast cancer survivors at a White House ceremony last Friday and claimed that American health care is "a system that only adds to the fear and stress that already comes with the disease."

The truth is, a woman diagnosed with breast cancer in the U.S. has a 90% chance of surviving it. In Europe, a woman's chance of survival is below 80% on average. These statistics, from the National Bureau of Economic Research, reflect the experiences of all women, not just those with insurance.

According to the bureau's research, women fare better in the U.S. because breast cancer is diagnosed earlier and treated more aggressively. From 1985 to 2005, death rates from breast cancer have declined faster in the U.S. than anywhere else.

Why? In the American system, there is a premium on the development of new detection methods and therapies. In other countries, government health programs delay adopting innovations in order to keep treatment costs down.

President Obama's Nobel Prize this month captured headlines. But if breast cancer is a worry for you, three other Nobel Prizes awarded this month are more important. Scientists working in the U.S. took the Nobel Prize in Medicine for their research on how cancer cells go on dividing and duplicating far longer than healthy cells. Their research may hold the key to stopping the relentless growth of cancer.

Only one of these three Nobel scientists, Dr. Carol Greider, was born in the U.S. The others were born in countries with government-run health care but chose to relocate to the U.S. to pursue their careers in medicine. Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn emigrated

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from Australia to the U.S. in the 1970s because, she told The New York Times, this country was "notably attractive" as a place to do research. Dr. Jack Szostak came from London.

During the current national health care debate, one important fact is overlooked: the unrivaled pace of medical discovery in the U.S., which is largely responsible for higher cancer survival rates here, according to the research bureau.

Innovation is also responsible for about two-thirds of the annual increase in American health care spending, according to presidential adviser Dr. David Blumenthal, writing in the New England Journal of Medicine in March 2001.

Blumenthal and other advocates of the health overhaul want cost controls that would limit access to care. But Blumenthal himself has written that "government controls on health care spending are associated with longer waits for elective procedures and reduced availability of new and expensive treatments and devices."

Today, no one battling cancer wants to settle for what oncologists had to offer a decade ago, and 10 years from now no one will want to settle for 2009 treatments.

Families dealing with cancer and other incurable illnesses should think twice before supporting the administration's health care overhaul. The pace of innovation does add to costs, but it also gives families reason to hope.

*McCaughey is founder of the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths.*