“What Can We Do About Cancer? The Most Vital and Insistent Question in the Medical World” (1913), by Samuel Hopkins Adams [1]

By: Darby, Alexis Keywords: Cancer awareness cancer taboo

In 1913, journalist Samuel Adams published “What Can We Do About Cancer? The Most Vital and Insistent Question in the Medical World,” hereafter “What Can We Do About Cancer,” Ladies’ Home Journal. Cancer is a disease that is the result of abnormal cell division in different parts of the body, such as the breasts or uterus [2]. During that time, many women did not discuss or disclose early symptoms of cancer or prevent the disease through regular screenings, such as breast exams and pap smears [2]. Adams asks in the introduction of “What Can We Do About Cancer?”: “What can we do about cancer? Is there any hope for women at all in the face of this disease?” [1]and provides a representation of what people in the early 1900s thought to be the early warning signs of cancer in women. Although, as of 2021, researchers have made advancements that have increased the scientific understanding of cancer and how it develops, Adams’ article provided women in the US during the 1910s with recommendations on early methods of cancer detection.

Adams was a journalist and novelist in the early twentieth century, though he did not have any scientific background. Specifically, in 1905, prior to publishing “What Can We Do About Cancer,” Adams released a series of eleven articles in the US social reform magazine Collin’s. In those articles, he expressed that it was common for medical companies to make false, unsubstantiated claims about the efficacy and effectiveness of their medications. In the introduction of his article, Adams says that as a result, he, along with medical professionals, changed his views on cancer and how it develops.

In the introduction of the article, Adams begins by stating that cancer-related deaths increased during the early 1900s and few physicians understood how to prevent it. He states that prior to the article’s publication in 1899, breast cancer was the most common cause of death. Adams further states that in 1913, approximately two-thirds of people who died of cancer had passed away from cancer as the cause of death, with the most common cause being cervical cancer. He then states that throughout the 1910s, there was a significant increase in cancer cases, especially in women. Adams states that the article was written to provide a clear understanding of cancer and to inform women on how to detect and treat it.

In the next section, titled, “Medications are Useless; Delay in Operating is Deadly,” Adams asserts that early recognition of cancer may lead to a significant increase in survival rates. He claims that it was common at the time for a person to believe it was possible to avoid cancer and that it was possible to treat it. However, Adams states that such beliefs were not accurate. He also states that early detection and treatment can help increase the chances of survival.

In the final two sections, titled, “When It Affects the Intestines and Other Parts,” and “The Risk is Not in Surgery, but in Delayed Surgery,” in which he discusses the importance of early detection of cancer and how to treat it.

Then, in “Any Irritation Needs to be Investigated At Once,” and “Absolutely Hopeless Cases of Cancer of the Stomach are Saved,” in which he outlines the need for individual vigilance in cancer detection and how to treat it.

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Sources

[1] Ladies’ Home Journal, which was a US magazine designed specifically for women. The magazine released its first publication in 1883 and released quarterly installments and an online presence until 2016. When Adams published “What Can We Do About Cancer” in 1913, people considered cancer to be a taboo topic to discuss with friends and family, as many people feared a cancer diagnosis, according to author Leonid Polonsky. According to researchers Ann Bode and Zigang Dong, “What Can We Do About Cancer” was one of the first popular articles for women published about the warning signs for cancer, such as breast or ovarian cancers. At the time, public and scientific communities treated the information in “What Can We Do About Cancer” as accurate.

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[3] Harvard Women’s Health Watch, which is a哨兵式 program that monitors women’s health and recommends appropriate screenings and treatment. The program was developed by Harvard University and provides women with information on how to manage their health and prevent diseases. It is designed to help women make informed decisions about their health.

[4] Harvard University, which is a private research university located in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is one of the most prestigious and influential universities in the world. Harvard University is known for its excellence in teaching and research, and it is home to many of the world’s top scientists, scholars, and leaders. It is also known for its strong emphasis on public service and social responsibility.

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