National Foundation for American Policy

February 25, 2013

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New Research Finds Over 40 Percent of America's Top Cancer Researchers are Immigrants

Despite Green Card Difficulties Immigrant Researchers Have Played a Key Role in the Improvement of Cancer Survival Rates in America

Arlington, Va. – More than 40 percent of the cancer researchers at America's top cancer institutes are immigrants, according to a new report released by the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an Arlington, Va.-based policy research group.

"The outstanding work of immigrant cancer researchers is an example of how being open to immigration can benefit Americans," said the report's author Stuart Anderson, executive director, National Foundation for American Policy, and former head of policy and counselor to the Commissioner of the INS (August 2001 to January 2003). The study found cancer researchers often wait years for permanent residence and endure the same long wait for green cards as other highly skilled immigrants and their employers. "The lack of reliable ways for even cancer researchers to obtain permanent residence illustrates some of the serious problems with America's immigration system," said Anderson.

The report, "The Contributions of Immigrants to Cancer Research in America," is available at www.nfap.com.

The report found immigrant scientists have played an important role in the improvement in cancer survival rates experienced by Americans. Examining the immigration background of researchers at America's leading comprehensive cancer centers, including Johns Hopkins, Memorial Sloan-Kettering, the MD Anderson Cancer Center, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and others, reveals a high percentage of cancer researchers at these facilities are foreign-born. Moreover, biographies and interviews reveal a deep dedication to improving the lives of patients and Americans in general. The findings make a strong case for America liberalizing policies on high skill immigration for individuals in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, including doctors and foreign-born professionals with degrees in biology and chemistry.

At some point, cancer, “a group of diseases characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells,” touches the lives of everyone in America, since it is likely every American knows (or will know) a friend, relative or co-worker who has contracted cancer. Over 1.6 million new cancer cases occur each year, according to the American Cancer Society. Moreover, more than 577,000 people in the United States die from cancer annually, the second leading cause of death behind heart disease.

Despite these troubling statistics there is also good news as the move toward increased specialization has benefitted Americans. “The 5-year survival rate for all cancers diagnosed between 2001 and 2007 is 67 percent, up from 49 percent in 1975-77,” reports the American Cancer Society. The survival rates have improved for the most common forms of cancer. “The 5-year relative survival rate for female breast cancer patients has improved from 63 percent in the early 1960s to 90 percent today.” Medical research is the primary reason for the improvement in cancer survival rates. Such research leads to new treatments and greater understanding of the body’s responses to different forms of cancer.

To conduct the research the National Foundation for American Policy examined approximately 1,500 biographies of cancer researchers at the nation’s leading cancer research centers (as measured by grants received from the National Cancer Institute). Among the findings:

- Overall, 42 percent of the researchers at the top 7 cancer research centers are foreign-born.

- At the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center 62 percent of the cancer researchers are immigrants. In 2012, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked MD Anderson the number one cancer treatment facility in the country for patients.

- At Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, 56 percent of the researchers are foreign-born.

- The significant contributions of immigrants can also be seen at other top cancer research facilities. At Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia, 44 percent of the cancer researchers are immigrants. At Johns Hopkins Sidney Kimmel Comprehensive Center – 35 percent immigrant researchers; at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute – 33 percent; University of California San Francisco Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center – 32 percent; and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center – 30 percent.

- The researchers at the top 7 cancer centers come from more than 50 nations. Among the 56 countries, the leading country of origin for cancer researchers is China, followed, in order, by India, Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, Russia, Lebanon, South Korea, France, Japan, Israel, Australia, Greece, Spain, Brazil, Taiwan and Argentina. Researchers from China account for 21 percent of the foreign-born cancer researchers at the 7 centers (and 8 percent of all cancer researchers at the 7 centers). India was the country of origin for 10 percent of the foreign-born researchers, followed by Germany and Canada at 7 percent, and the United Kingdom at 6 percent.

- Four immigrant cancer researchers have won the Nobel Prize: Elizabeth Blackburn (2009), born in Tasmania, Australia, Baruj Benacerraf (1980), born in Italy, and Carl and Gerty Cori (1947), husband and wife researchers born in Austria-Hungary.

- Eleven immigrants have served as president of the American Association for Cancer Research; two immigrants, George H.A. Clowes (UK) and Leo Loeb (Germany), were among the organization's original 11 members, which has now grown to 34,000 members.

- The first head of the National Cancer Institute was an immigrant, Carl Voegtlin. Immigrants lead cancer centers or key departments around the country. An example is Peter Jones, born in South Africa, who was director of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center.

- Dr. Alfredo Quiñones-Hinojosa is a Professor of Neurosurgery, Oncology, Neuroscience, and Cellular and Molecular Medicine at Johns Hopkins University. He is the director of the Brain Tumor Surgery Program at the Johns Hopkins Bayview Hospital and Director of the Pituitary Surgery Program at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and leads the facility's Brain Tumor Stem Cell Laboratory. He first came to America as an undocumented immigrant farm worker and overcame obstacles to graduate from Harvard Medical School and become a leading neurosurgeon. He performs over 250 brain surgeries a year, often removing life-threatening tumors and his work in brain cancer is funded by the National Institutes of Health.

- Dr. Waun Ki Hong, a native of South Korea, is one of the founders of chemoprevention and the leader of the MD Anderson Cancer Center's Division of Cancer Medicine. His research and clinical work on premalignant lesions of the larynx has enabled thousands

of patients in the United States to avoid potentially damaging surgery and maintain the ability to speak and swallow.

American cancer institutes and other employers have similar needs to retain top talent. The issue is important as the United States faces an aging population but also the potential for great medical and technological breakthroughs to save and enhance lives.

Many of the individuals who help combat cancer at America's top cancer facilities typically work in H-1B status at some point in their careers. In practical terms, that means legislative or regulatory restrictions aimed at H-1B visa holders would likely harm efforts to treat Americans afflicted with cancer. Foreign nationals working in H-1B status while at a cancer research facility typically include physicians, researchers, research technicians, information technology specialists and lab technologists. When sponsoring cancer researchers through the labor certification/green card process, cancer institutes endure the same costs and time as other employers.

If one would poll Americans on which immigrants they would most like to see admitted to the country, it is likely cancer researchers would be at the top of the list. Therefore, it was surprising to officials at research institutes that Congress specifically excluded the fields that would have allowed foreign-born cancer researchers to gain permanent residence (green card) in the United States when the U.S. House Representatives passed H.R. 6429, the STEM Jobs Act last year. The bill did not pass the U.S. Senate and cancer center officials hope this will be corrected in any future legislation.

Previous estimates from the National Foundation for American Policy show wait times today for many employment-based immigrants, particularly those from India and China due to the per country limit, range from 6 years to even decades. A grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation funded the research for this NFAP paper. The contents of the report are solely the responsibility of the National Foundation for American Policy.

About the National Foundation for American Policy

Established in the Fall 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder, former U.S. Senator and Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham and other prominent individuals. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at www.nfap.com.

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