

Cancer society defends \$12 million ad campaign

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The American Cancer Society has launched an aggressive \$12 million ad campaign in an effort to convince the public that it does more than drum up donations for research.

Some critics, although they support the nonprofit agency's efforts, say the money would be better spent helping patients.

The society is using about 2 percent of the donations it takes in annually to pay for the campaign, which began Feb. 15 and will run through March. That's a considerable amount, especially for a nonprofit organization, said Dean Krugman, a University of Georgia advertising professor.

The society already has widespread name recognition. A May 1998 Gallup poll showed that 96 percent of Americans recognize the organization's name.

But the same poll found that only 5 percent of about 1,000 adults surveyed knew what the Atlanta-based organization does.

"There is a deep understanding that we fund research," said Greg Donaldson, the American Cancer Society's vice president. "There's a lack of clarity around the fact that we do so much more."

The organization wants to highlight community programs that perform services such as encouraging women to get mammograms and men to have prostate-cancer screenings.

The nationwide ads, which include billboards and radio and television spots, promote the society's toll-free hot line and Web site, selling the organization as a source of unbiased cancer information and comfort for patients.

By purchasing ad time, the society

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can ensure that its message will be broadcast at times when a large audience is watching. Relying on public-service announcements would put that control in the hands of TV stations.

"They've done a lot of great things for a lot of years, but the criticism is basically that they could do a lot more good if they spent their money a little differently," said Thomas DiLorenzo, an economics professor at Loyola College in Maryland. "That money could have been spent helping individual patients."

DiLorenzo's book, *Unhealthy Charities: Hazards to Your Health and Wealth*, depicts the American Cancer Society as a money-hungry organization that spends donor money meant for patients on administration and real estate.

The society raised more than \$556 million in fiscal 1998, according to organization records.

It spent about \$100 million each on research and prevention, about \$70 million on detection and about \$85 million on patient services. The company reported that it spent about \$140 million on administration and fund-raising.

John Kelly, the society's national chairman of the board, said inform-

ing the public of specific program was crucial to the organization's goal of reducing cancer deaths.

"This is not something that the American Cancer Society can wave a magic wand and have happen," he said. "We need to make them aware what they can expect at the community level."

The goal isn't to solicit donations but to educate the public about what it does, society officials said.

Kelly, who said his organization was more efficient than ever, said the ads were already a success.