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## Administration

### Trump's Pick for Cancer Chief Draws Sharp Praise From Researchers

President Donald Trump plans to tap a University of North Carolina cancer center director to lead the NIH's cancer programs.

As director of the National Cancer Institute, Norman E. "Ned" Sharpless, would lead the largest of the 27 institutes and centers at the National Institutes of Health. The NCI directorship requires a presidential appointment, but not a Senate confirmation.

The White House announced the president's intention to nominate Sharpless just three days after affirming that NIH Director Francis Collins would stay on as the permanent director of the agency. If finalized, Sharpless would be leading an institute that has experienced unprecedented momentum in science and at the same time faces potentially historic funding cuts.

**First Director Since 2015** Sharpless is currently the director of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center. He would succeed Harold Varmus, who was the NIH director under Bill Clinton and the NCI director under Barack Obama. Since Varmus left in April 2015, the institute has been led by Doug Lowy, who oversaw the agency's implementation of the cancer moonshot initiative, the goal of which is to double the rate of progress in cancer research and treatments.

Lowy, who has worked at the NCI since 1975, has the institutional knowledge and understands the inner workings of the agency, Jeff Allen, president and chief executive of Friends of Cancer Research, said in a June 12 interview.

"That was a big positive," Allen told Bloomberg BNA. At the same time, installing a presidentially appointed nominee to run the NCI comes with the additional backing and the support of the administration, he said.

"Hopefully that can translate into making the institute's priorities both within the NIH as well as HHS and the larger budget climate a priority," Allen said.

**Genomics, Immunology Advances** If officially appointed, Sharpless would come to an agency that is advancing genomic technology by making headway in targeted treatments that work at the molecular level, Allen said. The Friends CEO also noted advances in the burgeoning field of immunology, in which scientists are learning how to train the body's immune system to combat cancer cells.

"These two approaches really have the potential to complement each other to build on the benefits that each mode of technology has provided in a synergistic way," he said. "From a scientific standpoint, one could argue that we are at a transformative period in cancer research."

Margaret Foti, chief executive officer of the the American Association for Cancer Research, expressed similar thoughts. "Friday's appointment by President Trump to select Dr. Sharpless as NCI's next director ensures a continuity in leadership and management at the NCI that is especially needed during this historic era of unprecedented scientific opportunities that are before us," she said.

**Potential \$1 Billion NCI Cut** While the 21st Century Cures law (Pub. L. 114-255) will provide the NIH with an additional \$300 million in fiscal year 2018, the Trump administration also wants to cut more than \$1 billion in cancer research funding in FY 2018 as part of an overall budget proposal for the Department of Health and Human Services.

"There's been a lot of interest about how the cancer moonshot will transition from one administration to the next, and obviously we're quite interested in that," Allen told Bloomberg BNA. "But we also wouldn't want to lose sight of all the other programs that the NCI is continuing to move forward with as well."

**Praise for NCI Nomination** Both Friends and AACR expressed support for the administration's intent to nominate Sharpless.

AACR President Michael A. Caligiuri in a June 11 statement said of Sharpless: "His enthusiasm for innovative scientific methods and ideas, as well as his appreciation for the value and importance of basic research to advancing translational discoveries, will allow the

NCI to continue leading the way in programs aimed at preventing disease, improving health, and reducing suffering from cancer, while also helping to maintain America's edge in the life sciences."

UNC Chancellor Carol L. Folt described Sharpless as "a visionary leader and a truly gifted scientist and clinician, and we strongly agree he would be an excellent choice to lead the National Cancer Institute into the future" in a June 9 statement.

NIH Director Francis S. Collins noted Sharpless has authored more than 150 original scientific papers, reviews, and book chapters, and holds 10 patents.

"I've known Dr. Sharpless professionally for many years as an outstanding scientist, clinician, and administrator, and we are very fortunate to have him join the NIH leadership team," Collins said in a June 12 statement.

The NIH director also praised Lowy, who prior to his acting director role was the institute's deputy director. "The entire cancer research and patient care community owes Dr. Lowy a tremendous amount of gratitude over the past two years for his extraordinary dedication and outstanding commitment to reducing cancer incidence, morbidity, and mortality."

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*The White House statement is available at <http://src.bna.com/pLy>.*