



**For Immediate Release**

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**National Children's Cancer Society Sees Dramatic Increase in Families Seeking Help;  
Non-profit Believes Economy Is the Cause**

**November 26, 2008 (ST. LOUIS, MO)** – The National Children's Cancer Society (N.C.C.S.) provided assistance to 22 percent more families in October than they provided in September. The organization believes the struggling economy is the cause for the increase.

"This economy has left many struggling, and families that have a child with cancer are no exception," says Julie Komanetsky, N.C.C.S. Vice President of Patient and Family Services. "In fact, their struggles are amplified by the financial burden of cancer, as parents often must take leave from work in order to care for their sick child."

The N.C.C.S. provides financial and in-kind assistance to families who have children fighting cancer, including help with meals, gas money, health insurance premiums, transportation, lodging and phone cards. Komanetsky says N.C.C.S. families are struggling to pay for the costs of getting a sick child to treatment, maintaining the family health insurance, child care for well siblings and meals and lodging when they must travel hundreds of miles to pediatric oncology centers.

Matthew Pitera, whose 12-year-old son was diagnosed with a brain tumor in August, says his family is one of those families. Pitera is a child psychiatrist who has maintained a private practice in New Jersey for 15 years. But with his son's illness and the economic downturn, he is leaving private practice.

"My practice was profitable and I could make a decent living when I was running at 110 miles per hour, working 12-hour days," he says. "But since my son is sick, I've had to cut back to help get him to treatment which is 80 miles away, and to help with the other kids. Me cutting back combined with the fact that the insurance companies of my patients are taking up six months to pay – I can't make payroll or pay my lease."

Pitera has accepted a position with a hospital system, meaning that he'll have a salaried job. He says he's sorry to close his practice, but is grateful he was able to find another position and get the assistance his family needs from the N.C.C.S. "I never expected to have these financial challenges, but in reality, we'd give up our house, our cars, whatever it takes to have our son get better."

The N.C.C.S. understands that all parents feel the same way, and strives to lessen the financial burden these families must bear. In October, the organization helped 899 families, compared with 736 families in September and 667 families in August.

"The demand for our services is increasing as our economy worsens," says Komanetsky. "The N.C.C.S. wants to be a source of support for these families in need and we want to help with the financial struggles so that parents can focus on what's most important – taking care of their child. But our resources are limited."

### **About the N.C.C.S.**

The mission of The National Children's Cancer Society (N.C.C.S.) is to improve the quality of life for children with cancer and their families worldwide. From Oct. 1, 2007 to Sept. 30, 2008, the N.C.C.S. provided more than \$3 million in direct financial support to 3,872 families as part of its Pediatric Oncology Program. Since 1987, the N.C.C.S. has provided more than \$44 million in direct financial support for families in the United States, including:

- Meal assistance to the parent who remains bedside in their child's hospital room day in and day out;
- Gas money for the parent who is working to keep a roof over their family but does not have the money to visit the child in the hospital;
- Health insurance premiums so a parent does not have to choose between working and taking care of their child;
- Transportation for the child to get to treatment whether by train, plane, bus or car;
- Lodging assistance for a family that lives too far from their child's treatment facility but needs and wants to be close by;
- Assistance with medical expenses that are medically necessary but are denied by health insurance;
- Phone cards to make sure families always stay connected to their loved ones as well as to their child's doctor.

Families with children diagnosed with cancer needing financial assistance can get more information at [www.nationalchildrenscancersociety.org](http://www.nationalchildrenscancersociety.org) or by calling 1-800-532-6459 (5FAMILY). If you would like to help the N.C.C.S in its mission, please send a check made payable to The National Children's Cancer Society at One South Memorial Drive, Ste. 800, St. Louis, MO 63102. You can also donate online at [www.nationalchildrenscancersociety.org](http://www.nationalchildrenscancersociety.org).

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