How Actress Shantel VanSanten's Personal Tragedy Led to Lung Cancer Advocacy

The actress has joined forces with the American Lung Association to raise awareness about the disease.

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Shantel VanSanten initially believed that lung cancer affected only people who smoke. But when she lost her grandmother to the disease, the *Shooter* actress got a reality check. Now, she's teamed up with the American Lung Association to share her story and raise awareness, reports PEOPLE.

VanSanten's grandmother, Doris Dooyema, was a nonsmoker and a breast cancer survivor. When she was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer in 2013, VanSanten became her caretaker. Dooyema died seven months later at 79 years old.

"We searched to understand what the cause was, and we found it was from radon poisoning, which was found in [her] basement," said VanSanten.

The American Lung Association defines radon as a "colorless, tasteless, odorless gas." Exposure to this gas is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States.

"It's preventable if you just educate yourself to test your home," VanSanten said. "You should test radon before you move in and continue to test every five to seven years for radon."

VanSanten wants folks to be aware of the signs and symptoms of lung cancer. She recommends visiting SavedByTheScan.org to take a quiz that assesses risk and whether screening is necessary.

The American Lung Association initiative LUNG FORCE, which VanSanten recently joined, is dedicated to defeating lung cancer. Thanks to LUNG FORCE's partnership with CVS Health, until May 26, you can donate money for lung cancer awareness, research and education at your local CVS pharmacy.

Click here to learn about the risk factors for lung cancer.

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