

Celebrity Cancer Diagnoses

Bold-faced names can raise awareness about cancer—and spread misinformation.

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In recent months, several bold-faced names have openly discussed their cancer journeys, no doubt helping educate the general public. Countless Americans probably first learned about multiple myeloma when U.S. Congressman Steve Scalise, a Republican from Louisiana, posted on social media in September that he was undergoing treatment for the blood cancer. Scalise, the majority leader, has remained in the legislative spotlight, proving that in many cases, folks with cancer can continue leading their active lives.

Similarly, supermodel Linda Evangelista revealed that she had been diagnosed with cancer twice: breast cancer in 2018 after an annual mammogram and then, despite having had a bilateral mastectomy, cancer of the pectoral muscle in 2022.

In November, actor Erik Jensen, who has appeared in *The Walking Dead*, *Mr. Robot*, *Mindhunter* and more, announced he had Stage IV colorectal cancer, spurring discussions, for example, about what the different stages mean.

Then there's Suzanne Somers, who died of complications of breast cancer a day before her 77th birthday and 23 years after her first breast cancer diagnosis. Beloved for the sitcom *Three's Company* and for the ThighMaster exercise device she created, Somers worried cancer advocates when she published *Knockout*, a book questioning the appropriateness of chemotherapy to treat common cancers. She also promoted so-called bioidentical hormones as an alternative treatment for menopause. As KFF Health News wrote upon her passing, "Somers' legacy [is] tainted by celebrity medical misinformation."

"It's clear that cancer misinformation is a pervasive problem across social networks," noted New York University School of Medicine's Stacy Loeb, MD, in a National Cancer Institute article on the dangers of promoting unproven treatments. It's important, she said, that health care providers "have an open discussion with people about what they've seen on social media, and to share evidence-based cancer information."