Patti LaBelle Urges American to Catch Up On Cancer Screenings

The singer has partnered with two organizations to advocate for cancer screening, which dropped steeply early in the pandemic.

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If you turn on the TV at any point in the next few months, you might spot a familiar face. Patti LaBelle, the Grammy Award–winning “Godmother of Soul" who famously recorded “Lady Marmalade” and “The Best is Yet to Come,” has teamed up with the national organizations Community Oncology Alliance (COA) and CancerCare to speak about the importance of cancer screening in the wake of the pandemic. Through October 2021, she will appear in public service announcements (PSAs) on a range of platforms to encourage eligible adults to schedule appointments with their health care providers.

In an interview with USA Today, LaBelle, 77, said she wanted to do the PSAs because she lost all three of her sisters to cancer. “They all died before they turned 50, and when I turned 50, it was a milestone to me because I made it through without getting cancer,” she said. (In addition to her sisters, LaBelle lost her best friend, Claudette Henderson, to breast cancer, according to CancerConnect.)

The PSAs were filmed for COA and CancerCare’s initiative “Time to Screen,” a nationwide campaign that aims to address concerning trends in cancer screening rates.

In 2020, many people skipped routine screenings for fear of contracting or transmitting COVID-19. That year, oncologists recorded a 75% decline in colon cancer screenings and an 85% decline in breast cancer screenings, according to a COA press release. While screenings have since picked up to a degree in many parts of the country, some researchers predict that cancer deaths will increase in the next five years as a consequence.

“Staying current on recommended screenings is essential to maintaining your health,” Patricia J. Goldsmith, the CEO of CancerCare, said in the release. “The more people who hear this message and heed our call to action, the more support we can provide to ensure timely access to and information about vital screenings.”

The “Time to Screen” PSAs address screening for six common and frequently deadly cancers: skin

cancer, lung cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, cervical cancer and colorectal cancer. Each cancer type claims thousands upon thousands of lives in the United States each year, according to the American Cancer Society. In addition, the PSAs provide information and logistical support to people interested in scheduling a screening. Eligible adults can visit www.TimeToScreen.org or call the "Time to Screen" hotline at 855-53-SCREEN (855-537-2733) to read about the cruciality of cancer screening and find screening locations in their vicinity.

"I've learned timing is everything in life, and right now, it's time to take control of your health," LaBelle said in the release. "I know what it's like to lose loved ones far too early to cancer. Don't wait until it's too late. I tell everyone, 'Honey, it's time to get screened.'"

For more on how the ongoing pandemic has affected cancer screening rates, read "For Cancer Screening, COVID-19 Creates Obstacles, Opportunities" and "Breast and Cervical Cancer Screenings Fell Sharply During COVID-19 Crisis."

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