

Do not give lung cancer short shrift

MEAGHAN LATONE
Guest essayist D&C

November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month. What? You didn't know? How can that be? Didn't you know that lung cancer is the deadliest, and most common of all cancers? So, where is our national ribbon campaign? Just so you know, our ribbon color is clear or pearl. But unfortunately you won't see those ribbons prominently placed all over like the pink ribbons for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

We don't have any spokespeople that I know of. Our research is 20 years behind other cancers, even though each year more people will die from lung cancer than breast, liver, prostate, melanoma, colon and kidney cancers combined! Why the lack of attention, of research? Because, like AIDS, lung cancer has a stigma. It is assumed that if we have lung cancer, it is our own fault — we smoked. However, let it be known that there is a growing number of people, including myself, whose lung cancer was not caused by smoking. It is believed that environmental factors such as radon, asbestos and pollution are contributing factors. Regardless of what causes the disease, the number of those afflicted each year is staggering — and while the number of breast cancer patients sometimes supercedes that of lung cancer patients, the mortality rate is significantly higher for lung cancer. How can you keep your family safe? The problem is that there is a lack of early detection. As of yet there are no proactive diagnostic tests or tools, like mammograms or breast self-exam for breast cancer. Lung cancer patients often show no symptoms until the cancer has already spread and pain surfaces elsewhere in the body.

I had excruciating lower back pain. After a few attempts with medications and rest, I ended up in the hospital. After many x-rays and a spinal biopsy, a CT scan showed the cancer in my bones. The tumor had spread from the lung to my spine, pelvis, femurs and liver. My case is not rare. About half the people diagnosed with lung cancer are in the advanced stages of the disease. By then, treatment offers little hope for a cure.



Most of us diagnosed in stages 3 or 4 will die within five years. This is unacceptable. I'm 36. I'm married with two young children. I have things to do.

My whole life is ahead of me. I didn't deserve cancer — nobody does. Not at any age; not any type. I don't have the answers to try to reverse this scourge. I only know that until this disease gets the best of me, I have a responsibility to at least draw attention to it.

The Pink Ribbon Campaign started somewhere, right? Someone got fired up enough to do something about breast cancer. Now it's my turn. I'll take the first swing for the team. November is our month. I ask for heightened public awareness. I ask for financial attention to research and diagnostic tests. I ask for tools for early detection. I ask for the world to think twice before making an assumption that we caused our own cancer.

My life could very easily be yours. I expect and encourage a collective outrage to bring about a "Rainbow Ribbon Campaign" in which all cancers get equal attention!

Latone lives in Chili.

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Meaghan asks you to remember.

Meaghan lost her personal battle to lung cancer. But the fight must go on. The best way to honor her fighting spirit and memory is to join the battle. Please support early detection for lung cancer in every way you can, including this year's Meaghan's Run 5K Race/Walk.

Meaghan never gave up hope.
Please help keep her goals
and dreams alive.

Early Detection: The Key
to Fighting Lung Cancer

Today, there are no early diagnostic tools for lung cancer. By the time the disease is found, it's often in an advanced stage where treatment offers little hope for recovery.

Age-Group Categories

14 & under

15-19 20-24 25-29

30-34 35-39 40-44

45-49 50-54 55-59

60-64 65-69 70-74

75-79 80 & Over



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