

LaSalle D. Leffall, Jr., M.D., F.A.C.S.

Cancer surgeon, oncologist, medical educator and civic leader

Residence: Washington, D.C.



In the coming year, more than 1 million cases of invasive cancer will be diagnosed in the U.S. – with African Americans accounting for a disproportionate number of these cancers. For people between the ages of 35 and 50, the most common types of cancer are breast and colorectal for women, prostate and lung for men.

The word cancer has the ability to trigger an emotional reaction in a person, conjuring up words such as treatment, surgery and chemotherapy. But there is one word that cancer surgeon Dr. LaSalle D. Leffall, Jr. said should be no longer automatically associated with cancer: death.

“One of the challenges with diagnosing and treating cancer in inner cities is that many people believe once they have cancer, they’ve been given a death sentence. There is no truth to this,” said Leffall, who has taught more than 4,500 medical students in the 44 years he has been on faculty at Howard University College of Medicine. “They believe they’re not going to be cured, so they don’t see a reason to try.”

Leffall has devoted his professional life to the study of cancer. As the first African American president of the American Cancer Society (ACS), he launched a program in 1979 that studied increasing incidence and mortality of cancer in African Americans. A critical factor to being cured, he determined, is understanding symptoms and getting access to quality care.

He uses CAUTION to spell out common cancer warning signs: Change in bowel or bladder habits; A sore that does not heal; Unusual bleeding or discharge; Thickening or a lump in the breast or elsewhere; Indigestion that is persistent; Obvious change in a wart or mole; and Naggging cough or hoarseness.

Preventive actions can be taken to reduce the risk of most cancers, said Leffall. For example, moderating alcohol intake can help prevent esophageal cancer. Quitting smoking significantly decreases the chances of developing lung cancer. Colonoscopies can detect polyps that could result in colon cancer. Mammograms can show lesions that could lead to breast cancer.

As chairman of both the President’s Cancer Panel and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Leffall is working toward making care more accessible by challenging convention and initiating change.

“Without health, nothing in life means anything,” said Leffall, who enjoys reading and listening to modern jazz. “I try to use all the resources available to me to address health disparities. I keep an open mind and always strive for excellence.”

Prevention



Cancer

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FACT

About 137,910 new cancer cases were expected to be diagnosed among African Americans in 2005.

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STAGE OF LIFE – *Adult*

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 1993: Condoleeza Rice named provost at Stanford University, becoming the youngest person and first black to hold this position.	2 1958: Frederick M. Jones patents control device for internal combustion engine.
3 1979: Robert Maynard becomes first African American to head a major daily newspaper, <i>Oakland Tribune</i> in California.	4 Labor Day 1957: Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus calls out the National Guard to bar black students from entering a Little Rock high school.	5 1960: Leopold Sedar Senghor, poet and politician, elected president of Senegal.	6 1848: Frederick Douglass elected president of National Black Political Convention in Cleveland, Ohio.	7 1954: Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland, public schools integrated.	8 1981: Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, dies.	9 1968: Arthur Ashe Jr. wins men's singles tennis championship at U.S. Open. 2000: Venus Williams wins women's singles tennis championship at U.S. Open.
10 1855: John Mercer Langston elected township clerk of Brownhelm, Ohio, becoming first black to hold elective office in the U.S.	11 1959: Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington wins Spingarn Medal for his achievements in music. 1999: Serena Williams wins women's singles tennis championship at U.S. Open.	12 1913: Track and field star Jesse Owens born. 1992: Dr. Mae C. Jemison becomes first African American woman to travel in space.	13 1886: Literary critic Alain Locke, first black Rhodes scholar, born.	14 1921: Constance Baker Motley, first black woman appointed federal judge, born.	15 1963: Four black girls killed in Birmingham, Alabama, church bombing.	16 1923: First Catholic seminary for black priests dedicated in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.
17 1983: Vanessa Williams crowned Miss America.	18 1895: Booker T. Washington delivers famous Atlanta Exposition speech.	19 1893: Albert R. Robinson patents electric railway trolley.	20 1830: First National Convention of Free Men agrees to boycott slave-produced goods.	21 1815: Gen. Andrew Jackson honors courage of black troops who fought in Battle of New Orleans. 1998: Florence Griffith Joyner, Olympic track star, dies.	22 Rosh Hashanah Begins (sundown) 1862: Emancipation Proclamation announced. 1989: Gen. Colin Powell is confirmed as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, first African American to hold the post.	23 1863: Civil and women's rights advocate Mary Church Terrell born.
24 1957: Federal troops enforce court-ordered integrations as nine children integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.	25 1974: Barbara W. Hancock becomes first African American woman named a White House fellow.	26 1962: Sonny Liston knocks out Floyd Patterson to win heavyweight boxing championship.	27 2000: Venus Williams wins an Olympic gold medal in women's singles tennis.	28 1991: National Civil Rights Museum opens in Memphis, Tennessee. 2000: Venus and Serena Williams win Olympic gold medals in women's pairs tennis. 2003: Althea Gibson, first African American tennis player to win Wimbledon, dies.	29 1910: National Urban League founded in New York City.	30 1962: James Meredith enrolls as first black student at University of Mississippi.



Since 1928, the American Cancer Society has used the sword as its symbol as it continues to champion the causes of cancer prevention, eliminating suffering from cancer and saving lives.

African American History Calendar
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