



# Surviving the Odds

*Breast Cancer Survivor Consuelo Ross:  
Health Advocate For Women of Color*

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The diagnosis of breast cancer is heart wrenching for any woman, but consider if your odds of dying from it are far greater than other groups of females. Statistics show the mortality rate for women diagnosed with breast cancer is 2.6 percent out of 100,000 cases diagnosed, but for women of color, African-American and Hispanic women in particular, the chances of succumbing to it are five to six times higher.

“We can no longer turn a blind eye to this concern, and we must treat more aggressively the issue of women of color dying at far higher rates,” remarked Consuelo Ross, founder and president, Surviving the Odds. “We find that Caucasian women are more educated on the subject of breast cancer, and this knowledge must get to women of color as well. Breast cancer does have a face, and it is one of many

different colors.”

Consuelo is a breast cancer survivor herself, and after beating the disease seven years ago she realized her true mission was to educate, build support and bring awareness of breast cancer and how it affects minority women to the community. She founded the non-profit agency Surviving The Odds, which is dedicated to decreasing the mortality rate in women of color due to breast cancer. African-American and Hispanic communities are experiencing the highest rates of death due to breast cancer, much more than that of any other ethnic groups.

“We must understand that there is a sense of urgency to save the lives of women of color as it pertains to breast cancer. We must increase the awareness and stop generalizing breast cancer,” emphasized Consuelo. This belief has motivated Surviving the Odds to take action and reach out specifically to these high-risk

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results in a lack of annual checkups, exercise and consumption of healthy foods,” revealed Consuelo. “If we are diagnosed with breast cancer, we are faced with the possibilities of losing our mate, comparison to that of Caucasian women. This in turn may influence women of color not to take advantage of free medical resources that are available to some of them. There is also the possibility

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“Women of color don’t always see the importance of our own health. Often times the primary concern of health and wellness is directed toward the family and not our own preventive care, which

not having someone to assist us, or we simply just refuse to accept the reality. We reduce it to ‘what will happen when I do die’ rather than fighting breast cancer to live.” Consuelo also points to a lack of trust in health care providers and institutions due to racial disparity and the quality of mammography, which varies considerably in

of losing a job and potential financial struggles. In some areas, religious beliefs may prevent a woman from seeking proper medical care.

Many of those views are taking an alarming toll on successfully treating women of color with breast cancer right here in our own back yard. Wyandotte County has the highest disparity rate





in the nation, with 11 percent of women of color losing their lives to late stage diagnoses of breast cancer, while the national average is 4.6 percent. Surviving the Odds is one of the founding partners of the Wyandotte County Task Force created to understand and address these issues. The group's mission is to improve the breast health of all Wyandotte women, no matter their race, through meaningful partnerships, community initiatives and effective patient navigation.

Part of the awareness that Surviving the Odds drives is understanding that women of color have a much higher incident of triple negative breast cancer. This is a subtype that is generally diagnosed based on the lack of three "receptors" known to fuel most breast cancers: estrogen receptors, progesterone receptors and human epidermal growth factor receptor HER2. The most successful treatments for breast cancer target these receptors. Unfortunately, none of these receptors are found in women with triple negative breast cancer.



"It is such an aggressive cancer. Triple negative may start in the breast, but can come back anywhere in the body, especially the major organs such as the brain, spine, lungs and skin," stated Consuelo. "Because it is so aggressive, we see a higher disposition of late

stage cancer in women of color when it is diagnosed, which makes it so much harder to defeat. But even though it's aggressive, it is treatable. Triple negative breast cancer is very responsive to chemotherapy, but it must be caught early."

Boosting the odds of survival for women of color is built on education and awareness. Surviving the Odds is dedicated to making a significant difference in fighting breast cancer in minority communities with a comprehensive breast health education program. By partnering with faith-based organizations and health care providers, these outreach programs focus on decreasing the mortality rate in women of color. Through the program My Sister's Keeper, women receive breast health

education, information on breast cancer prevention, early detection/screenings, mammograms, access to available community resources and patient navigation services for the full cycle of care "With our patient navigation system, we help women through the entire process, from finding, diagnosis, treatment and through survivorship," remarked Consuelo. "The purpose of the navigator's activity is to assist patients with making informed decisions by thoroughly understanding their diagnoses and their options; to assist in directing the patient through the various systems and to provide solutions to overcome all barriers, whether they may be insurance, financial concerns, utilities, livelihood, transportation and others."

As for increasing awareness, women of color tend to possess a very strong faith base, and My Sister's Keeper allows Surviving the Odds to present information through community churches and

them through to survivorship," noted Consuelo.

Consuelo believes that she is on a mission to help women of color level the playing field and gain the upper hand against breast cancer and its devastating impact on them. "Medically, we need more support for what we are attempting to achieve, and that comes in the form of partnerships and charitable services. Many of these women have no health insurance or are underinsured and do not qualify for state programs or Medicaid. Therefore, we need more support to assist in closing this gap."

To help offset some of those costs and to help fund the educational component of Surviving the Odds, the organization has partnered with Team Inspired to host the Darrell Sublett 5K run on October 11 at the Centennial United Methodist Church, 18th and Woodland, in the Historic Jazz District. Darrell passed away from triple nega-

tive breast cancer in 2011, leaving two children. Those who knew her were so inspired by her resilience during her illness that the race was named in her honor. All are encouraged to participate or donate, and those interested can register through the Surviving the Odds' website or on the day of the race.

With the support of Surviving the Odds, the opportunity to turn the numbers around for women of color in their fight against breast cancer can be realized. To make a difference, it will take determination, education, awareness, quality medical treatment and intense followup driven by the women themselves, their families, the community and passionate leaders such as Consuelo Ross. **HLM**

For more information, visit the website at [stofoundation.org](http://stofoundation.org) or call 816-866-3STO (3786).

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partner with them to educate and provide free services such as clinical breast exams. Any individual can be trained as an outreach patient navigator to help women through the process of fear, acceptance and continuum care. "We want these women to know that there is help, and that Surviving the Odds will be with them every step to see

