

ABIPA – ASHEVILLE BUNCOMBE INSTITUTE OF PARITY ACHIEVEMENT

Chadwick & Joe Make Colorectal Cancer Awareness Real

By JéWana Grier-McEachin, Executive Director

Colorectal Cancer's Impact on African Americans and Younger People

Can you think of anyone you know who has had colorectal cancer? The passing of *Black Panther* star Chadwick Boseman at the age of 43 came as a surprise and shock to many. For a seemingly healthy, relatively young man to die from colorectal cancer seems almost incomprehensible. So, imagine how shocking the same diagnosis was for Joe Greene at age 40? Joe Greene is the face of advocacy for us this month.



JéWana Grier-McEachin. Photo: Pro16 Productions

While colorectal cancer isn't as common in people under the age of 50 as it is in older people, it's not as uncommon as many might think. It was estimated in 2020 that about 12% of colorectal cancers—about 18,000 cases—will be diagnosed in people under the age of 50 in the US. What's more, while rates of colorectal cancer have been falling in older age groups in recent years, they've actually been rising among younger people.

Colorectal cancer also disproportionately affects the Black community, where the rates are the highest of any racial/ethnic group in the US. African Americans are about 20% more likely to get colorectal cancer, and about 40% more likely to die from it, than most other groups. Chadwick and Joe are the faces that bring humanity to these numbers.

The reasons for the differing rates are complex, but they largely reflect differences in risk factors and in health care access, both of which are related to socioeconomic status. In fact, African Americans are disproportionately burdened by cancer in general. They often experience greater obstacles to cancer prevention, detection, treatment, and survival, including systemic racial disparities that are complex and go beyond the obvious connection to cancer.

"Colorectal cancer is the second deadliest cancer in the country," said Durado Brooks, MD and vice president of prevention and early detection at the American Cancer Society. "This disease is ravaging the Black community, and

it is as important as ever that everyone has access to, and is receiving, the recommended screenings. Even during the coronavirus pandemic, necessary screening tests remain available to prevent the disease or find it at an early, more treatable stage."

People at higher risk for colorectal cancer should ask their doctor whether screening for cancer earlier might be right for them. Screening can often prevent colorectal cancer by finding and removing growths, called polyps, in the colon and rectum before they have a chance to become cancer. Screening can also find colorectal cancer early, when it is still small, hasn't spread, and is likely to be easier to treat.

The American Cancer Society doesn't recommend screening before age 45 for most people, largely because the benefits aren't likely to outweigh the possible downsides. But, it's still important to be aware of possible symptoms of colorectal cancer, no matter your age.

The most common symptoms of colorectal cancer include:

- A change in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool, that lasts for more than a few days
- A feeling that you need to have a bowel movement that's not relieved by having one
- Rectal bleeding
- Blood in the stool, which might make the stool look dark brown or black
- Cramping or pain in the abdomen (belly)
- Feeling tired or weak
- Losing weight without trying

Many of these symptoms can also be caused by other conditions. But, if you have any of them, especially if they last for more than a few days or are getting worse, it's important to have them checked out by a doctor as soon as possible so the cause can be found and treated, if needed. As you read this month's page, I challenge you to have conversations about colorectal cancer with family members, friends, and your health care provider.

For more information about colorectal cancer, visit www.cancer.org/cancer/colon-rectal-cancer.html.

Source: American Cancer Society



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Meet Joe Greene

Joe Greene is a father, a business man, and, yes, a survivor who is still fighting. Next month it will be one year since he was diagnosed with Stage 3 Colon Cancer at the age of 40. His is the voice crying out to us all that early detection saves lives.

Even though the insurance-covered screening age is 45, Chadwick Boseman and Joe Greene are proof that exceptions to this rule need to be made. Joe has made it his life's duty as a passionate ambassador to get the age threshold changed.

Learn more about Joe's story by visiting Facebook.com/ABIPA.CARES, and by listening to our interview with him this month on WRES 100.7 FM.

The End, or an Endemic?

by Kelly White, MHE, MPH,
ABIPA Health Education Program Manager

Heading into yet another year of the Covid-19 pandemic, I am searching for the light at the end of the tunnel.



Kelly White, MHE, MPH. Photo: Pro16 Productions

I remember thinking at the beginning of 2021 that this would all be over and we would be able to go back to normal. To my surprise, and everyone else's, we went through an entire year of masking and praying that we would not have to go into yet another shut down.

Coming into 2022, and wanting to feel somewhat free of all the virus talk, I can't help but think about the ways we can all begin to move toward an endemic phase of Covid-19.

Although we are not there just yet, an endemic, simply put, means that coronavirus does not completely go away, but that it will pop up in regions around the globe instead of infecting and killing millions of people all over the place. With mask mandates dropping in just about every state, how do we continue to stay safe and feel like we are finally heading back to some of the small things we once enjoyed?

Let's face it, nothing is going to be just as it was almost three years ago, but we can make the best of the situation

by learning how to live with the virus. One of the great advances in science is that we have learned so much about the Covid virus. Patients are having better outcomes in the outpatient setting, and less lengthy hospital stays, even if they are admitted under some of the worst health conditions.

With the quick infection rate of the latest Omicron variant, learning to live with the virus includes getting recommended vaccinations to create herd immunity, which would build protection for those who are not yet ready to be vaccinated.

Planning for an endemic future includes not letting up on the actions we have been following over the last couple of years. Continue to follow the recommendations that have proven to be helpful in slowing the spread—masking when you are going to be in a crowded space, or when going into an environment with others outside of your home whom you do not know; continuing to wash your hands; and, most importantly, staying home if you are feeling ill.

Listen to ABIPA's Body & Soul Radio Show on WRES 100.7 FM, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:30 a.m. on wresfm.com.

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