Learning from Each Other to Improve Prostate Cancer Care

By Ken Griffey Sr.

I’ll never forget the round of golf I played with three friends of mine shortly after my prostate cancer diagnosis. That day, I was surprised to learn that two of them had also been diagnosed but they hadn’t been comfortable speaking up about it until they saw the news about me. Turns out, the situation with those two friends wasn’t all that unique. I’ve been touring the country with Bayer and Men Who Speak Up for more than six months now, and it still surprises me how few men are speaking up about advanced prostate cancer.

The truth is, all men with prostate cancer should speak up, especially our African-American community. African-American men suffer the nation’s largest prostate cancer burden, with an average annual incidence rate 70 percent higher than the rate in white men. Prostate Cancer Awareness Month is an important time to speak up, which is why I’m continuing my journey in Washington, D.C. for two events this September for the African-American community. I am honored to attend the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation’s Health and Wellness Luncheon on September 14, as well as Prostate Health Education Network’s 12th Annual African-American Prostate Cancer Disparity Summit, taking place September 15-16 on Capitol Hill.

Prostate cancer is an issue that’s close to my heart. As someone who lost four uncles to the disease, I learned the importance of advocating for my own health early on. My mother drilled into me and my brothers that prostate cancer was something we needed to be aware of, given our family history. Despite all of my preparations, I was still unprepared for that diagnosis. One of the biggest lessons I learned after my diagnosis is that symptoms in prostate cancer, such as fatigue and difficulty performing normal activities, often don’t emerge until the disease has advanced, and it’s not always easy to determine the cause of these symptoms. But doctors can help men recognize their symptoms and manage their disease, as long as men are willing to speak up about them. When it comes to prostate cancer, it’s hard for men to admit they have this kind of a problem, but being open with your doctor can make a big difference in how the disease is managed.

Speaking up can help us learn from each other and find support in realizing that we are not alone during our cancer journeys. When my golf buddies and I started to share information with each other about our prostate cancer experience, it really helped. With this in mind, I’m asking each of you to join me in speaking up, and to help us gather more information that can help save lives and improve care. One way to do this is through the Cancer Support Community’s (CSC) Cancer Experience Registry, a unique online community that allows people facing cancer to share their experiences, identify the issues that impact their lives, access resources and learn from each other. The CSC wants to ensure that men of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds who are living with prostate cancer – especially African-American men – are represented in the registry. The service is free, confidential and open to anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer or provides care for a cancer patient. To join the Registry, fill out a simple registration form and then a more detailed questionnaire. Your answers will be used to improve care for people with cancer and their caregivers and to develop better programs and services for the cancer community.
Once you start speaking up, you’ll wonder why you didn’t start sooner. For tips on how to start the conversation and for more information about my personal journey, visit MenWhoSpeakUp.com. Visit CancerExperienceRegistry.org to join the CSC online community and learn more about the Registry.

Ken Griffey Sr. is a three-time baseball all-star, a prostate cancer survivor, and a spokesperson for Bayer’s Men Who Speak Up program, which encourages men with advanced prostate cancer to know the symptoms of progressing disease and offers resources to help them feel more comfortable speaking up about it. Mr. Griffey, who is conducting a nationwide Men Who Speak Up tour with his son, Hall-of-Famer Ken Griffey Jr., will be a guest speaker at the 2016 Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. this month.