

BLACK CANCER

WITH
JODI-ANN BUREY



Interview Transcription

NBC 5 DFW | *Community Conversations: Cancer in the Black Community*

November 5, 2020

Watch the interview [here](#)

About this segment:

African Americans have the highest mortality rate of any racial and ethnic group for all cancers combined. That's according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In today's NBC 5 Conversations: a Call for Change talks with Jodi-Ann Burey. She's a cancer survivor and hosts a podcast called Black Cancer.

In Conversation:

Vince Sims - NBC 5 DFW Reporter

Jodi-Ann Burey - Host & Producer of the podcast, Black Cancer

Vince Sims

Thank you for joining us for this NBC 5 Conversations: Call for Change. Today we are joined by Jodi-Ann Burey, who runs a podcast among other things - she's a speaker on a lot of different things - but has a podcast called Black Cancer. Jodi-Ann, thank you very much for joining us.

Jodi-Ann Burey

Thank you so much for having me, Vince.

Vince Sims

Alright, let's first of all talk about your podcast, Black Cancer. What is this?

Jodi-Ann Burey

Black Cancer is my labor of love project. It explores the stories behind the cancer journeys of everyday people of color. And it aims to redefine that cancer journey, that it doesn't just belong to the person who has the diagnosis. And so the folks who come on the show are caregivers, they themselves might be cancer patients, cancer survivors, maybe they lost someone to cancer, maybe they have a gene mutation that predisposes them for cancer. Right? And so, cancer - the journeys are vast. A lot of people's lives are touched by cancer in some way and so the podcast tries to illuminate those stories in some regard, mapped onto our identities as folks of color.

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Vince Sims

What made you come up with this idea and want to do this?

Jodi-Ann Burey

Honestly, Vince, I was trying to create something that I wish I had almost three years ago. I was faced with a cancer diagnosis, a really rare spinal tumor, and I felt so lost. I felt so alone. I felt like I was the only person in the world who was experiencing this and that put me in a really dark place for a long time. And so once that cloud of that experience started to lift, the more I became more open about talking about my own experience, I realized that, wait, this friend had cancer? This person lost their mom to cancer. Okay, this person had genetic testing for cancer. I was having really rich conversations with folks in my community, and I wished I had that when I was going through my own journey. So, I just wanted to create something that even if one person listened to it and felt less alone or felt like they could find more information, or they could find the strength to advocate for themselves through that whole process, then I did my job. So that's what the podcast is all about.

Vince Sims

From your journey and experience, do you think in the Black community we talk about cancer and people in our families that have had cancer less than maybe other communities?

Jodi-Ann Burey

You know, it's so interesting that as a culture, generally, our society at large, we talk about cancer so much. We talk about cancer literally. We talk about all the things that you need to do or not do to prevent cancer. We talk about cancer in a figurative sense: "Oh, it was like a cancer." But when it comes to our actual stories, we don't have that conversation. And I think for some communities, it can be even more difficult to talk about that. Right? I'm a Jamaican immigrant, and I remember my family talking about my grandmother who was "sick" and died. And so it was years until I realized that that "sickness" was cancer. And actually cancer showed up a lot in my family, but it was coded. You know, we hear people saying, "The Big C," "They were sick," using all of these euphemisms for cancer. And so I feel like, even though we talk about it in this pop cultural way, it's really difficult for anyone to talk about cancer. And I think it's even more difficult for communities that might have, you know, more norms around not being as vocal about things that are seen to be so private and personal.

Vince Sims

This is definitely something that affects the Black community. I was just looking, the American

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Vince Sims, continued

Cancer Society estimates over 200,000 new cancer cases in African Americans for 2019, more than 73,000 cancer related deaths. So it's definitely something impacting the community. What do you think when you hear those statistics and how it impacts the community?

Jodi-Ann Burey

You know, I come from a public health background, so I understand incidence rates, mortality rates and all of these numbers and statistics that can feel really daunting as a person. Jodi-Ann. Right? So, when I was going through my own experience having that public health background, right, I was like, wait, those statistics don't actually matter in my life. What I'm looking for right now are other folks of color who are maybe my age, who deal with this idea of being the strong Black woman who's at a point in her life where she feels the most weak. Right? That's what I care about. I don't live my life every day as an incident rate, as a statistic, as a mortality rate. And I think that particularly when we talk about people of color, Black folks specifically, how can we elevate our personhood? How can we think about who we are as individuals and how we're navigating the healthcare system, and the racism in the healthcare system?

And so, yes, we know statistically speaking, communities of color, Black communities specifically, immigrant communities, poor communities will have the shorter end of the stick at every single turn when it comes to healthcare, when it comes to cancer. Yes. And I'm a person. It's Jodi-Ann. What is out there for me to actually navigate how I can talk about this within myself, with my family, with my loved ones, with my job? You know? Where is that experience? Where is that support? That's what the podcast is trying to do: to share those stories and help people navigate how we can talk about this with folks outside of our communities, within our communities, within ourselves.

Vince Sims

Jodi-Ann, why is it so important to talk about it and hear these stories from people that look like you?

Jodi-Ann Burey

Well, you want to know that you're not alone. And seeing someone who's navigating it with the other layers and nuances of your identity, it's really, really important. Also, across the board, there are two types of people. There are people who need a lot of information, and so they're going to monitor. I'm going to go to the doctor. I'm gonna ask 10,000 questions. And then I'm going to research everything online, I want to know everything. And there are folks in this other

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Jodi-Ann Burey, continued

camp that are like, I don't want to know. I don't really want to go to the doctor. I'm not gonna do any more research. There's a lot of fear that prevents that information. Now, when we're talking about cancer, knowing is huge. Time is huge. And the knowing and the time can literally, literally be the difference between life and death. And so to talk about it, even in a small way to kind of reduce that fear to increase someone's desire to know, can save somebody's life.

Vince Sims

One of the things you talked about and you mentioned is finding that community, you used the word community. Describe for me what you mean when you say that, "finding your community."

Jodi-Ann Burey

"Finding your community," to me means, is there something about my experience that I can see in you? Is there something about your experience that I can see in myself? Because then that can reduce the guardedness in what we talk about, what we try to know. I remember the first time I had a conversation with a friend and I had no idea that just before COVID, she was the primary caregiver for her mother who was going through her own cancer journey, to a point where she lived in the hospital for months. Did not leave. Right? And her as a caregiver, I'm seeing this, I'm seeing my experience in her as someone who was a patient who had my sister who was caregiving for me. And I'm like, wait a minute. Even though she didn't have my exact experience, we were in community. We are people who faced the thing that everyone is scared of. And we're facing it head on. We're finding nuances of how to navigate that. You know, Audre Lorde talks about what it means to come face to face with death, to understand your own mortality. Something changes in you, when you experience that for yourself, or when you're intimately near someone who's experiencing that. And so that's what community means for me, that even just a fragment of what you're experiencing, I'm also experiencing that and we can support each other in some way.

Vince Sims

I want to ask you to get your thoughts on it, because you're very about being public and sharing the stories and the experiences to enlighten others. Very high profile, Chadwick Boseman passed away from cancer. Nobody knew. You know, it was something that he battled within his tight circle. Your thoughts on how he went through the process or that process?

Jodi-Ann Burey

When I got the news about Chadwick Boseman's death, I cried. It hurt me to the core that he

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Jodi-Ann Burey, continued

died of something that he was years from even being screened for. And just think about that, the incidence rates and who gets to determine when we get screened for something. And so when I saw that, it hurt me deeply, deeply, as somebody who has had to advocate for tests and MRIs and blood tests and been faced with, “No,” a lot. And so when I think about his experience, I also think about Serena Williams and what she faced in her childbearing process. We know that Black women are three to four times more likely to die in that process. Even if you are a rich, highly-monied Black person, you might still face a lot of discrimination in people understanding that you need support or you're in pain or whatever the metrics are of when you need to be screened or tested for something might actually be earlier for you.

And so when I think about his experience, when I even think about my own experience of disclosing that you're going through the thing that everyone's scared of – how close was that circle of people who knew? How much of that he had to hide? How many times did he have to kind of have this avatar of himself as a superhero, and be feeling his body deteriorating for years? And I don't think that's dissimilar from just a regular person of color, right? Particularly a regular Black person, a Black woman, to have to put on this armor of being this like Black girl magic superhero. Right? And be suffering.

And the layers of that experience and his death just hurt me deeply, and when I talked to other folks of color, particularly Black folks who heard that news, it was also devastating for them. Not just personally but understanding racism in the healthcare system and what that means to navigate that regardless of your socioeconomic status. So, I mean, let that be the beacon to shine the light that we need to be really, really serious about Black folks in clinical trials. About believing the pain of Black and brown people. About making it easier to navigate the healthcare system.

You know, in one of my episodes, a friend of mine, Frantz in Episode Seven, he talked about his sister who ultimately succumbed to her triple negative breast cancer. As a nurse, she knew that the lump that she felt was something serious. And how when she advocated for herself, mind you, someone who knows how to manage the healthcare system, how to navigate the healthcare system, be advocating for herself with her own doctor, and them dismissing her. That it was, you know, “fatty tissue.” If we're seeing that with everyday, regular people we're definitely still seeing that with famous people who are still trying to say, “Can you believe me? This thing is a problem. This thing hurts.” And that's the thing that's just so devastating. It's so devastating. And unnecessary! Absolutely unnecessary. I'm sorry, I'm just like going off on this, but he got diagnosed at what, Stage 3? Stage 3. Imagine what could have been different for

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Jodi-Ann Burey, continued

him - and I don't know the specifics of his situation, [Vince: Mmhmm] but we know that if you get diagnosed at Stage 2, Stage 1, there are more options for you, potentially. So a Stage 3 diagnosis just, ugh, I was just so upset about that. I'm so upset about that.

Vince Sims

I understand. And you know it is troubling when you think about how it goes and how it affects everyone, but Jodi-Ann, you are shining a spotlight on this within the community. You are giving a platform to share the stories and a voice. So let's end this with sharing with people how they can find out more about your podcast, Black Cancer, and how they can follow you. Give us your information socially for people to get more information.

Jodi-Ann Burey

Yeah, you can find me on the internet. I'm on Instagram at [@jodiannburey](https://www.instagram.com/jodiannburey). You can find Black Cancer on Instagram at [@_black_cancer](https://www.instagram.com/black_cancer). We have a website, blackcancer.co, and we have transcripts of all the episodes for deaf accessibility. Black Cancer is available on every podcast platform, so just type in Black Cancer and you should be able to find it.

Vince Sims

Jodi-Ann Burey, it has been a pleasure chatting with you. Thank you for sharing this information and for the platform for the stories of the community to be shared about Black Cancer. Thank you very much.

Jodi-Ann Burey

Thank you. Thank you so much.
