



January 28, 2022

My Story of Beating Prostate Cancer – One Year Later

One year ago today, my primary care doctor and the heroic nurses, physicians, surgeons, and staff at Northwestern Medicine guided me through and performed a surgery that saved my life.

A few months earlier, I thought of myself as a healthy and fit 48-year-old. I exercised and ate right. I got regular checkups. Mainstream science, like the United States Preventive Services Task Force, recommends that men should wait until they are 55 to discuss screening for prostate cancer with their doctor. The Task Force also says there isn't enough scientific evidence to make a separate, specific recommendation on prostate specific antigen-based screening for prostate cancer in Black men. That isn't good enough.

As a state representative and supporter of hospital and community health boards, I've learned that Black men are 66% more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer and are more than twice as likely to die from it, compared to our counterparts. Too many men, and especially Black men, die because we as a society have failed to address their prostate cancer risk as a priority. We need more research, better recommendations, more and better screening, and more effective treatments.

On January 28, 2021, I was in an operating room, fighting for my life. Today, I am cancer-free and fighting for equitable access to the test that saved my life. I believe the cost of a life-saving prostate cancer screening test should not keep anyone from obtaining the test when a patient and their doctor decide it is the best course of action. That's why I am introducing legislation in the Illinois General Assembly today that will require health insurers to eliminate copays, deductibles, and other cost-sharing measures for prostate cancer screening and necessary follow-up.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

And that is what has guided my entire journey of beating cancer.

I didn't see any stairs. I just saw cancer, so we took the proper steps, and I can't imagine things happening any other way. You never know what will happen in life, but you must have faith regardless of what comes your way.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District