

You Can't Escape Race in Cancer

Megan-Claire Chase, aka Warrior Megsie, is a seven-year breast cancer survivor. She's also a blogger and advocate.

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Have you ever been involved in a group where you felt safe enough to be authentic? What happens when that safe bubble unexpectedly bursts?

The more I talk openly about race within the cancer space, the more I see the true colors of those I never dreamed would have a racist bone in their body. I naively hoped that race wouldn't matter after I was diagnosed with cancer because it can be life-threatening. After all, we all bleed red. But I was slapped with another harsh dose of reality once I understood there's no escaping racism and white supremacy. It seeps into every part of my life and is just as toxic and unbearable as my cancer treatments. It became clear early on that I would never be seen as just a cancer patient. I would always be seen as a Black cancer patient and, ultimately, a Black cancer survivor.

Becoming an advocate was born out of my challenging experiences and the urgent need to spotlight the issues of access to care. Whether you want to hear it or not, race, age and your sexual identity play an ugly role in getting your concerns heard, having your pain believed and making connections with others.

While I initially found solace and connections in the early days of my survivorship, it has become more challenging to be in spaces—on Zoom or a panel or in a support group—where I am the only Black person. My nervous system is constantly in fight-or-flight mode, exacerbating my pain from toxic cancer treatments.

When you have the added stressors of coming from a marginalized community, where are the safe spaces to process your cancer experience mentally, emotionally and physically? How can we heal when dealing with microaggressions and implicit bias from doctors, other medical staff, employers and some cancer patients in support group settings?

I now understand why certain Black-only breast (chest) cancer support groups exist. I have yet to find a general cancer Black-only group that's a mix of men, women and those whose pronouns are they/them. While I am thankful for my many genuine friends in Cancerland, I am acutely aware that the majority are white.

I'm tired of being the only Black person in the room or on the Zoom screen.

I'm tired of white people wanting to recommend other "strong Black people" to me.

I'm tired of white people who send me private messages saying I'm an inspiration but who won't state it publicly.

Being Black has shaped my access to care, access to pain management and access to community support. With its never-ending rhetoric, this country forces us to see that we'll never be good enough, respected or valued. Black lives don't matter, and we are reminded of that daily.

I have lost count of the times I've received comments on various social media or in virtual support groups that "not everything is about race" or "race doesn't belong in the cancer space."

It's a bitter pill to swallow, knowing there's no scenario where I can eliminate having to center whiteness.

You can watch Megan-Claire Chase this summer as she talks cancer in "[Stories From the Stage](#)" on PBS. And you can read more from Chase in her [Cancer Health blog](#).

UPDATE. Here's more about the Stories From the Stage series, which is now live:

Beyond Cancer - [TV Episode](#)

Beyond Cancer - [Podcast](#)

Facebook Playlist [with 9 individual stories](#):

Link to article - "[Storytelling for Cancer Survivors](#)"