Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Reveals He Had Prostate Cancer Diagnosis

As a Black man, the NBA legend and former Lakers star is at greater risk of prostate cancer, a disease he's fought, he recently wrote.

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Black men are more likely to develop prostate cancer than men of other races, research shows. Former Los Angeles Lakers star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is among those men to have battled the disease, he recently revealed in a new essay published on WebMD.

"Being Black means I'm more likely to suffer from diabetes, heart problems, obesity, cancer and a shorter life in general," he wrote. "Yup, tall people and Black people have shorter life expectancies. So far, in keeping with these statistical risks, I've had prostate cancer, leukemia, and heart bypass surgery."

Abdul-Jabbar, age 73, who is 7 feet 2 inches tall, knows that his height and skin color, in particular, affect his health in numerous ways.

In 2009, Abdul-Jabbar shared his chronic myeloid leukemia diagnosis with the world. Although years later, he beat the cancer, many people don't know that he also had fought prostate cancer.

Although he didn't provide many details about his past prostate cancer diagnosis, he discussed how the health care system and others must do their best to protect Black lives at risk.

While Abdul-Jabbar said he's been fortunate to have the financial security to get the best medical attention, he knows very well that other Black people don't have that same resources and is fighting to change that.

The NBA legend acknowledges that police brutality has resulted in the deaths of too many Black Americans, but he believes a bigger threat to Black lives is "a health care system that ignores the fact that, though they are most in need of medical services, they actually receive the lowest level."

Findings show that Black people are more likely to have poor health outcomes than people of other races. For example, Black men are twice as likely to die of low-grade prostate cancer as men of other races.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how malignant the system is,” he said. “The virus has hit the African-American community at a much higher and more devastating rate than it has the white community.”

Abdul-Jabbar is dedicated to doing outreach in the Black community to ensure his people—including Black men who are at greater risk of developing prostate cancer—are getting the medical treatment and information they need to save their lives. That treatment and information helped saved his life when he was diagnosed with leukemia in 2008.

“The future of equity for Black Americans starts with physical and mental health, and as long as they are at the end of the line for services, true equity can’t happen,” he concluded. “Black lives have to matter in every aspect of American society if they are to thrive.”

For related coverage, read “Today Cohost Al Roker Reveals He Has Prostate Cancer” and “For Black Men With Prostate Cancer, Equal Access Means Equal Outcomes.”

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