

*Colon Cancer Congressional Hearings*  
*Topic: Greater Use of Screenings Would Save Lives*  
*Katie Couric Remarks*

SENATORS, GUESTS, MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC, THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR INVITING ME HERE TODAY. AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, I HAVE A VERY PERSONAL REASON FOR BEING HERE. MY WORLD FELL APART WHEN MY HUSBAND JAY MONAHAN WAS DIAGNOSED WITH COLON CANCER IN 1997. HE HAD NO FAMILY HISTORY OF THE DISEASE. AFTER AN UNBELIEVABLY COURAGEOUS BATTLE, HE DIED NINE MONTHS LATER, JUST TWO WEEKS AFTER HIS FORTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY. DURING THIS TERRIBLE STRUGGLE, MOTIVATED BY FEAR AND DESPERATION, I GOT A QUICK AND PAINFUL EDUCATION ABOUT THIS DEVASTATING DISEASE. I LEARNED THAT COLON CANCER IS THE SECOND LEADING CANCER KILLER. 130,000 PEOPLE ARE DIAGNOSED WITH IT EVERY YEAR. 56,000 OF THEM DIE. IT KILLS MORE PEOPLE THAN ANY OTHER CANCER, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF LUNG CANCER. AND IF WE WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO GET PEOPLE TO STOP SMOKING, COLON CANCER WOULD SOON HAVE THE UNFORTUNATE DISTINCTION OF BEING AT THE TOP OF THE LIST. WOMEN GET IT - THEY ARE DIAGNOSED AT A RATE SLIGHTLY HIGHER THAN MEN. MINORITIES GET IT - AFRICAN AMERICANS ARE AT A SLIGHTLY HIGHER RISK. YOUNG PEOPLE GET IT - 13,000 PEOPLE UNDER THE AGE OF 50 ARE DIAGNOSED EVERY YEAR. BUT I ALSO LEARNED THAT IT HAS A 90 PERCENT OR BETTER CURE RATE IF IT IS DETECTED EARLY. THAT MEANS THAT COLON CANCER SCREENING IS A CRITICAL WEAPON IN THE FIGHT AGAINST A DISEASE NO ONE NEEDS TO DIE FROM.

UNFORTUNATELY, PEOPLE ARE WOEFULLY UNAWARE AND UNEDUCATED ABOUT THIS KILLER. A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT. COLONS. RECTUMS. BOWELS. NOT EXACTLY THE STUFF OF COCKTAIL PARTY CONVERSATION. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE WHEN YOU SEE SOME OF THE DRESSES AT THE GRAMMIES AND HEAR SOME OF THE LANGUAGE ON TELEVISION THAT ANYONE IS EMBARRASSED ABOUT ANYTHING THESE DAYS...BUT THEY ARE...AND IN THIS CASE, IT COULD COST THEM THEIR LIVES. BUT IF YOU RECALL, NOT THAT LONG AGO, PEOPLE FELT UNCOMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT BREAST CANCER...AND MEN RARELY DISCUSSED THEIR PROSTATES. NOW THOSE CANCERS ARE ROUTINELY DISCUSSED WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS... AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, DOCTORS. WE HAVE TO DO THE SAME FOR COLON CANCER. SO REMOVING THE STIGMA IS MY FIRST DREAM. BUT PEOPLE NEED TO NOT ONLY TALK THE TALK, THEY NEED TO WALK THE WALK. AND WALKING THE WALK MEANS GETTING TESTED. ACCORDING TO THE CDC, A WHOPPING 60 PERCENT OF PEOPLE WHO SHOULD BE SCREENED NEVER HAVE BEEN. SOME PEOPLE FIND THE PROCEDURES LIKE STOOL TESTS, FLEXIBLE SIGMOIDOSCOPIES AND COLONOSCOPIES UNAPPEALING. I CAN TELL YOU THEY ARE ALL MUCH MORE APPEALING THAN DYING OF THIS DISEASE. I ALSO HAVE A DREAM THAT SOMETIME IN THE NEAR FUTURE EVERYONE COULD HAVE THEIR COLONOSCOPIES, CONSIDERED THE GOLD STANDARD FOR SCREENING, COVERED BY INSURANCE. THAT SHOULD BE THE CASE EVEN WHEN THERE IS NO FAMILY HISTORY, SINCE 80 TO 85 PERCENT OF COLON CANCER CASES FALL IN THIS CATEGORY. AND THAT THEY DO IT BEFORE THEY BECOME SYMPTOMATIC -- BECAUSE WHEN SYMPTOMS START TO PRESENT THEMSELVES, OFTEN TIMES THE DISEASE HAS ALREADY PROGRESSED. I AM GRATIFIED THAT MEDICARE NOW COVERS COLON CANCER SCREENING FOR THOSE 65 AND OVER. IT IS INCUMBENT THAT WE CONVINCED SENIORS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS. HAD CHARLES SHULTZ BEEN SCREENED, HE AND WE WOULD STILL BE ENJOYING HIS BELOVED PEANUTS GANG.

THE NEED FOR GREATER AWARENESS AND MORE WIDESPREAD SCREENING IS THE REASON LAST WEEK I, ALONG WITH LILLY TARTIKOFF AND THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY FOUNDATION, LAUNCHED THE NATIONAL COLORECTAL CANCER RESEARCH ALLIANCE. TOGETHER, I KNOW WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND I BELIEVE WE CAN SAVE LIVES. THE NCCRA HAS PLACED 5 MILLION EDUCATIONAL BROCHURES IN MORE THAN 25,000 CHAIN DRUGSTORES AROUND THE COUNTRY TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT COLON CANCER. WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM DENNIS FRANZ OF NYPD BLUE, JUDGE JUDY, BASEBALL PLAYER ERIC DAVIS AND SEAN FERRER, AUDREY HEPBURN'S SON...MOST PEOPLE DON'T EVEN KNOW SHE DIED FROM COLON CANCER. THOSE ADS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN AIRING ON TELEVISION STATIONS NATIONWIDE.

OUR MEDICAL ADVISORY BOARD CONSISTS OF SCIENTISTS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY CONDUCTING CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH ON PREVENTION STRATEGIES, NEW DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS, AND TREATMENT OPTIONS. INCIDENTALLY, THOSE SCIENTISTS SAY AWARENESS ALONE COULD CUT THE MORTALITY RATE FROM THIS DISEASE IN HALF. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT SAVING THE LIVES OF 28 THOUSAND FATHERS, MOTHERS, SISTERS, BROTHERS, SONS AND DAUGHTERS. TO THAT END, THIS WEEK AS PART OF NATIONAL COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH DEEMED BY CONGRESS LAST NOVEMBER, I AM ANCHORING A FIVE PART SERIES ON THE TODAY SHOW. AND TO PROVE TO PEOPLE JUST HOW EASY AND IMPORTANT IT IS TO GET SCREENED, TOMORROW ON THE PROGRAM I WILL GIVE THEM THE TRUE "INSIDE STORY" - SHARING EXCLUSIVE VIDEO OF MY VERY OWN COLON, SHOT DURING MY FIRST COLONOSCOPY. THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING.

THE BOTTOM LINE -- SO TO SPEAK -- IS THIS: I KNOW ALL TOO WELL, AS PERHAPS MANY OF YOU DO, ABOUT THE LIVES SHATTERED AND FAMILIES DEVASTATED BY THESE THREE WORDS -- YOU HAVE CANCER. OF COURSE, THERE ARE MANY HAPPY ENDINGS, BUT STILL TOO MANY SAD ONES. WE HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE THAT. PLEASE MAKE SURE THIS DISEASE IS NO LONGER IGNORED OR WHISPERED ABOUT. NOBODY NEEDS TO DIE OF EMBARRASSMENT. EVERY PERSON SCREENED IS A POTENTIAL LIFE SAVED. KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR PROVIDING THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY, TRULY OUR GREATEST NATURAL RESOURCE, WITH THIS IMPORTANT INFORMATION, MOTIVATING THEM TO GET SCREENED, AND HELPING THEM LEAD LONGER, HEALTHIER LIVES.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR HAVING ME HERE TODAY.