

Belafonte poster boy for life after prostate cancer

By Holly Shiver

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW YORK (NNPA) - To convey a message, a personal anecdote is often instrumental in driving the point home, while at other times celebrity has just as much impact, if not more.

Legendary actor, singer and activist Harry Belafonte, 78, indicated as much here at the National Medical Association's Annual Convention and Scientific Assembly.

He quipped that despite many statistics and sufficient research, a celebrity could often help charge a campaign — any campaign.

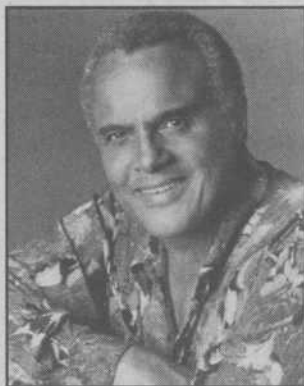
Belafonte was among a host of specialists who spoke during a July 26 press conference on "Racial Differences in Cancer: A Comparison of Black and White Adults in the United States."

The actor, who was diagnosed in 1996, candidly discussed his experience with prostate cancer and his decision to go public to, first, his family, and then the world.

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"...the discussion of cancer, in particular, prostate cancer, I had to inform myself of the host of things that I had just not been aware of."

— Harry Belafonte



over the bewilderment of the disease, I began delving into the nature of the disease and discovered that I could access help," he said. "I decided to step out and become an advocate."

"Many of my other celebrity friends are somewhat reluctant to step out and speak out," he said.

Belafonte named a handful of his peers — Sidney Poitier, Brock Peters, Roger Moore, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley — who have been infected by the disease, with all except one having been successful in treatment.

Belafonte is a stringent believer in early detection,

screening and awareness acknowledging that early detection and a proactive response saved his life.

"When I first accepted and understood my responsibility in stepping into the frame of the discussion of cancer, in particular, prostate cancer, I had to inform myself of the host of things that I had just not been aware of. I say that because of a particular characteristic in my history. I was born in poverty: My mother was an immigrant woman and she was undereducated. All of that carries its own specific set of hurdles when Black people are talking about accessing information and accessing treatment."

Nearly 5,300 African-

American men died from prostate cancer, and more than 27,000 were diagnosed with the disease in 2003.

Belafonte said that although prostate cancer is the second leading killer among American men, behind heart disease, the disease continues to be treated as taboo because it is a "macho disease," with very "macho" feelings.

Many men fear testing and diagnosis of prostate cancer because of rumored impotence.

"There's a myth circulating that says most men won't be able to engage in sexual

activity after prostate surgery, and it's absolutely not true. As I learned, there is often a full, active sexual life to be enjoyed after surgery — if detection is early," said the entertainer.

In general, prostate cancer is curable, if it is caught early enough.

"Going to your doctor for annual checkups could save your life," said Dr. Gerald Hoke, urology section chair of the NMA.

"Unfortunately, in the African-American community there's not enough of the awareness that tends to lead

to early diagnosis. Knowing the risk factors and symptoms and getting screened is an important start."

According to NMA, key risk factors for prostate cancer include age, family history, race and diet.

At-risk men, including African-American men 45 and over, and all men 50 and over, should talk to their doctors about prostate cancer and prostate screening.

Men with more than one risk factor should consider getting screened at 40.

Holly Shiver writes for Afro Newspapers.

L.A. post office to get Ray Charles name

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Ray Charles put his stamp on music. Now, folks can buy stamps from the Ray Charles Post Office Building.

Earlier this month, President Bush signed a bill into law that will change the name of a building near downtown to honor the musician, who died last year at age 73. An official renaming ceremony is scheduled for next month.

"Ray Charles was a giant among artistic giants," Rep. Diane E. Watson (D-Calif), author of the post office bill, said in a statement. "It is my hope that the Ray Charles Post Office will be only the first

of many posthumous honors for this great American treasure."

The post office is near the business office and recording studio where Charles produced "Georgia on My Mind" and his final album, the Grammy-winning "Genius Loves Company."

The building was declared a city historic landmark last year.

"Despite his enormous success, artistically and financially, Ray Charles was a humble man," Joe Adams, Charles' manager for more than 45 years, said in a statement. "He was a man of the people, so this is a wonderful tribute."

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