

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary to Mrs. Ford

REMARKS OF MRS. FORD
AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY
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I'm very glad to be here tonight, and that's not a line borrowed from someone.

I feel absolutely marvelous. I just had my annual checkup and all my tests are completely clear. There is no sign whatsoever of a cancerous re-occurrence at this point. I'm convinced that I am completely cured.

Thanks to that checkup last September, good doctors, a loving supporting husband and understanding children--I can truly say this past year has been one of the richest and happiest of my life.

When I went into the operating room that morning I had a pretty good pre-minision it was going to turn out to be a malignancy and that my breast would have to be removed. But once the operation was over, I was really very relieved. I felt the doctors had removed the cancer at such an early stage that I was very lucky and would have no more problems.

The most difficult moments were trying to pull my family through my cancer operation. I really had to pull them through, and to try to make them happy because they were so sad and upset.

The malignancy was something my husband never expected, and he couldn't believe it was happening to me. The whole family felt that way.

I think their surprise was a very natural reaction, because one day I appeared to be fine and the next day I was in the hospital for a masectomy. It made me realize how many women in the country could be in the same situation.

That realization made me decide to discuss my breast cancer operation openly, because I thought of all the lives in jeopardy. My experience and frank discussion of breast cancer did prompt many women to learn about self-examination, regular checkups and such detection techniques as mammography. These are so important. I just can't stress enough how necessary it is for women to take an active interest in their own health and body.

Too many women are so afraid of breast cancer they endanger their lives. These fears of being "less" of a woman are very real, and it's very important to talk about the emotional side effects honestly. They must come out into the open.

It was easier for me to accept the operation, because I had been married for 26 years and we had our four children. There was no problem of lack of love, affection and attention.

But some women don't have these same emotional resources, and it's very necessary to deal realistically with the fears about breast cancer.

It isn't vanity to worry about disfigurement. It is an honest concern. I started wearing low-cut dresses as soon as the scar healed, and my worries about my appearance are now just the normal ones of staying slim and keeping my hair and make-up in order. When I asked myself whether I would rather lose a right arm or a breast, I decided I would rather have lost a breast.

The most important thing in life is good health. And that I have!

That is the medical side. Cancer also produces fear--and most of that fear comes from ignorance about the progress already made and ignorance of the need for preventive medicine for men and women alike.

Cancer wherever it strikes the body, also strikes the spirit, and the best doctors in the world can't cure the spirit. Only love and understanding can accomplish this important role.

All of us can give love and support to our friends who have cancer. We can open our hearts and our minds to dealing with the fears that the victims have, and also the fears many of us have of the disease itself.

I believe we are all here to help each other and that our individual lives have patterns and purposes. My illness turned out to have a very special purpose--helping save other lives, and I'm grateful for what I was able to do.

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