

FIND YOUR MBC VOICE

MBC Voices at the Table | A Catalyst for Change

Meredith Vieira, TV Producer/Host

Jamil Rivers, Living with MBC since 2018

Felicia Johnson, Living with MBC since 2003

Beth Fairchild, Living with MBC since 2014

Michael Kovarik, Living with MBC since 2015

Stat on screen: In the U.S., the incidence rate of new breast cancer cases are nearly the same for black and white women.¹ However, black women with breast cancer are 40% more likely to die of the disease than white women with breast cancer.²

References: 1 Adv Exp Med Biol. Health and Racial Disparity in Breast Cancer. 2019; 1152: 31–49. 2 CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians. Breast cancer statistics, 2019.

Jamil Rivers:

I was shocked to learn that black women are dying from breast cancer at a 40% higher rate, and that we're actually more likely to die from breast cancer.

The largest contributor of those disparities is bias in the healthcare setting. As an advocate, I started working with other organizations to escalate the importance of equities.

Stat on screen: This year, over 284,000 people in the United States will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer. 6% of women have metastatic breast cancer when they are first diagnosed.

Reference: Cancer.net: <https://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/breast-cancer-metastatic/statistics>

Meredith Vieira:

Metastatic breast cancer, also known as stage four breast cancer, is breast cancer that has spread to other parts of the body. I'm Meredith Vieira, and I'm joined by Jamil Rivers, Felicia Johnson, Beth Fairchild, and Michael Kovarik, advocates living with metastatic breast cancer who don't want this often misunderstood disease to be ignored any longer.

All of you have become advocates. Beth, you started a movement of sorts to get the dialogue going when it comes to metastatic breast cancer and get attention placed where you noticed there wasn't any.

Beth Fairchild:

We did this virtual protest where we posted photos of ourselves in treatment, bald, after surgery, that were very much the reality of our lives.

I had not heard the word metastatic outside of my doctor's office, and now seeing it online and everyone talking about it, it's pretty rewarding.

Meredith Vieira:

Michael, for eight years you wouldn't even talk to anybody else with breast cancer. What made you decide, now I'm not only going to talk about it, I'm going to advocate for other patients?

Michael Kovarik:

The first time I met another male, it felt so freeing to actually talk to someone who understood what I was going through. And so that started my advocacy. And I never had felt such a sense of community. These women and few men that were there, the passion that they had about how important it was that we raise money for research.

Felicia Johnson:

There was at one point no metastatic community, whether it was breast, colon, lung, metastatic disease. And now I've seen the change where there is support, there is a community.

Beth Fairchild:

Cancer is constantly outsmarting whatever treatment or science is happening. And there's just not enough money that's being funneled into metastasis research for us to keep up with it. It feels very much like we are just an afterthought of funding.

Jamil Rivers:

If we're supposed to be saving lives from breast cancer, then why isn't there more emphasis and more money going towards metastatic breast cancer research? And I think the general public doesn't understand that.

Now we have to learn how to treat metastatic breast cancer. Now that we know so much more about what's going on and how it behaves, we can continue to develop new therapies and treatments for people to extend our lives.

Meredith Vieira:

Why is it so important for people with metastatic breast cancer to share their stories?

Jamil Rivers:

Who else is living with cancer more so than people that are still in treatment? We have to share what we're going through, what our experiences are, so that the resources, the landscape can actually meet our needs.

Beth Fairchild:

People who may not have access to support groups, or a community, or who are maybe more closeted with their diagnosis, they can log on to the computer and see a face that looks like them and someone telling a story that's similar to theirs, and it makes them feel less isolated and less alone.

Felicia Johnson:

It's a face of hope. I didn't know I could be as fragile as I have become, how vulnerable I am. And wanting to help people, wanting to talk to researchers, things that pre-disease we weren't involved with to begin with.

Michael Kovarik:

It puts a face to this disease. It's not metastatic breast cancer. It's Jamil. It's Michael. It's Beth. It's Felicia. And it becomes more to the point of, oh my God, that could be me. It could be my brother. It could be my sister. Then it becomes more than just the name, metastatic breast cancer. It becomes your name.

Meredith Vieira:

I want to thank you all for sharing your stories about living with metastatic breast cancer. Thank you for being here.

Dedicated in loving memory to our long-time friend Michael, a vibrant voice and unforgettable presence among the breast cancer community. His advocacy and unwavering hope for all people living with mBC will live on.

Michael Kovarik
1956-2021

Use our [Treatment Discussion Guide](#) to have a more informed conversation with your doctor.

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