

# FIND YOUR MBC VOICE

## MBC Voices at the Table | MBC Care Plan

**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

**Leigh Ann Wyrick**, Beth's Daughter

**Lance Johnson**, Felicia's Nephew

**Beth Fairchild:**

When I was super nervous and scared in the very beginning, my oncologist said, "Let me worry about your cancer, and I'll let you know when it's time to worry." It really freed my mind to focus on other things that were more important than cancer.

**Meredith Vieira:**

Receiving a metastatic or stage four breast cancer diagnosis can raise a lot of questions, if you know which questions to ask. I'm Meredith Vieira and I'm here with four advocates living with metastatic breast cancer, Jamil Rivers, Felicia Johnson, Beth Fairchild, and Michael Kovarik. We're talking about treatment and how finding your voice can empower your MBC journey.

Jamil, I want to start with you because you are really a take charge person.

**Jamil Rivers:**

I went of course to where I was first diagnosed, got what their treatment recommendation was. And then I started researching, how do black women respond to various treatments? And that was really hard to find.

**Meredith Vieira:**

You know, Michael, you had an oncologist that you really liked. How important was it to find an oncologist that speaks to you?

**Michael Kovarik:**

I had to feel that there was a very good open connection, because with that, I'm going to be totally open, I'm going to be to totally honest. That's why I feel that my care is the best that it possibly can be.

**Meredith Vieira:**

Be upfront about what you're feeling.

**Michael Kovarik:**

Yes, be upfront.

**Meredith Vieira:**

And I know Felicia, you were not upfront at first with your doctors.

**Felicia Johnson:**

No, I had this behavior of, I am superwoman, I am strong. I had a hard time every week, so these two strong men, my son, my first cousin, Royce, would take me to treatment, would make sure that I was being compliant to the nurses. Was I telling the truth? Because I never said a word, I just did what was necessary.

**Meredith Vieira:**

So, what did you learn from that experience?

**Felicia Johnson:**

Silence is not always golden. There are times in the cancer journey you need to speak up for help. One of the best things you can do is use the online community.

**Meredith Vieira:**

So, sites like Find Your MBC Voice. I know Beth, one of the first things you did was join a group of women 40 and under with metastatic breast cancer. Why was that important in terms of your treatment plan for you?

**Beth Fairchild:**

I was able to find a group of women who were diagnosed MBC 40 and under, finding that group was really instrumental in outlining what my treatment plan would be. I'm not the typical face of breast cancer. Breast cancer touches everybody, it does not discriminate male, female, black, white, rich, poor.

**Meredith Vieira:**

It must be so frustrating the four of you who are getting good care to see other folks who don't have it.

**Jamil Rivers:**

Yes.

**Meredith Vieira:**

For no reason, other than they may be a person of color.

**Felicia Johnson:**

Mm-hmm.

**Meredith Vieira:**

Or they don't make the money that someone else does or whatever it is.

**Jamil Rivers:**

There has to be systemic change. Yes, we can reinforce, and we can empower patients. We really have to escalate the importance of equities.

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

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:**

Just make sure that the patients of color are receiving that same standard of care.

**Meredith Vieira:**

How do you stay on this path that you're on? You've created this treatment plan; it changes depending on what's going on.

**Jamil Rivers:**

You have to be ready.

**Meredith Vieira:**

You have to be ready.

**Jamil Rivers:**

Have to be ready. So, every scan, I know what are my three options and who am I going to for that second and third opinion because I trust my oncologist but again, trust and verify.

**Felicia Johnson:**

Having to be ready is more than just medical ready. It's emotionally ready. What about my mental health? I live with the cancer, the cancer lives with me, and there are times when it's just us two alone. Your mental health wellbeing is impacted by how ready you are.

**Meredith Vieira:**

Once you find your voice, it changes the way you perceive yourself as a patient. I would think for the positive, if you have a voice and you use it.

**Beth Fairchild:**

Once I was able to find my voice and speak up for myself, I felt more empowered. I don't have any control over what my cancer's going to do, but what I do have control over is what doctor's going to look at me, what therapy am I going to take? And so, I think it's really important to find your voice and to find that little bit of control over your life.

**Michael Kovarik:**

Right now, at this moment, I'm okay, and I just keep repeating that, and that's when I feel that I'm in control and that's when I feel I can handle this now.

**Meredith Vieira:**

So, part of your treatment plan is being in that moment.

**All:**

Yes.

**Felicia Johnson:**

Being present.

**Meredith Vieira:**

Being present. I just want to thank you guys for sharing your treatment plans with us when it comes to metastatic breast cancer. I think that's something that anybody who is newly diagnosed needs to understand moving forward. So, thank you guys so much.

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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