

## Marcelle Leahy warns of skin cancer dangers

By Wilson Ring, Associated Press Writer | November 5, 2005

RANDOLPH, Vt. --The wife of Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy warned the people at a women's economic opportunity conference Saturday of the dangers of skin cancer by describing her ordeal with the disease.

Marcelle Leahy said her regular physician had told her for years that the spot on the left side of her face wasn't cancer. It was only after that doctor retired that her new doctor recommended a biopsy.

After a series of operations, the most recent in July 2003, the doctors were able to remove the last traces of cancer from the skin on Leahy's face.

"It is a very sobering and exciting feeling, all at the same time, to stand before you today and to be able to say that I have had cancer and am now cancer free," said Leahy, a registered nurse. "God willing and with the help of my doctors I hope to keep it that way."

Leahy gave the keynote address at the 9th annual Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, held at the Vermont Technical College in Randolph.

She used her talk to warn of the dangers of skin cancer and encouraged the women at the conference to ask questions about their health care.

"When I was young most of us thought that it was a badge of honor and courage to have a sunburn. We didn't use sunscreen and we would even put things on our skin to enhance the sun, and the burn that we were getting," she said.

"I did get cancer and my cancer was caused by sun damage. Others of us are predisposed to having skin cancer," she said.

More than 1 million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed every year in the United States and about 10,000 people die, one person every 68 minutes, she said.

The people most at risk of getting skin cancer are those who have fair skinned, with blue or gray eyes and of European ancestry," she said.

"Don't be complacent if you have more pigmentation in your skin, you are in a lower risk category, but you can still get skin cancer," Leahy said.

While Leahy's talk emphasized skin cancer, she urged the women at the conference to do regular breast self-examinations, watch their diet, not to smoke and to practice safe sex.

She also reminded the women at the conference that men can get breast cancer, too.

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"They need to be reminded to check themselves," Leahy said. "The mortality rate is actually higher for men than it is for women with breast cancer, because the cancer is usually more advanced when it is discovered in men."

Leahy said that her career has a nurse and her regular checkups showed that wasn't enough to keep her from developing cancer.

"I am urging you to get your regular checkups and if you have to cancel an appointment, don't forget to reschedule it," Leahy said. "Also listen to your instincts, I know that's not very scientific, but if you have something that worries you, and you think you have been given the wrong answer, keep searching until you are sure you have the right answer." ■

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