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Health News

Cancer survivor runs for awareness

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[Paula Wolfson](#), wtop.com

WASHINGTON - Michelle Present says faith and love have kept her alive.

The 42-year-old Lorton, Va. mom is one of the lucky ones. She beat ovarian cancer -- a disease often called "the silent killer."

Oftentimes the warning symptoms are few and to date, there's no preventative screening.

"Because of that, unfortunately, about 75 percent of women who develop ovarian cancer will be diagnosed in a late stage," says Dr. Willard Barnes, chief of gynecologic oncology at the Lombardi Cancer Center at [MedStar Georgetown University Hospital](#).

Present's cancer was an advanced stage three when she was officially diagnosed almost one year ago. She was sent to an oncologist after complaining of abdominal discomfort. All tests came back negative, and surgery was scheduled.

"It was more exploratory than anything," Present says. "And it was where they discovered I had a mass that was back deep in my pelvis that had attached itself to the muscles in my lower back and left leg. But it did not show up on a scan or a test."

Present says she kept pushing for answers because she just didn't feel right and Barnes says Present did exactly the right thing.

"You certainly need to look into things. Never minimize symptoms," Barnes says.

According to Barnes, any abdominal discomfort that lasts for more than a week or two should be checked out



Michelle Present was diagnosed with advanced stage three cancer, but was recently declared cancer-free. (Courtesy of Michelle Present)

Gallery: (2 images)



Six months after finishing chemotherapy, Present will lace up her running shoes to make a point.

"I have got a team of 25 people that are going to be walking and running with me in support for me and for all those beautiful ladies that are still fighting, will be diagnosed, and unfortunately, in memory of those who have lost the fight," says Present.

The [National Cancer Institute](#) estimates more than 22,000 American women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer this year. It also predicts that 15,500 patients will lose their fight against the "silent killer."

Present will head for the finish line just days after finding out a follow-up battery of tests this week found no signs of cancer.

"It is an emotional time," Present says, "I think it has finally sunk in with me this week, that you know what? I am a survivor!"

Here's more information on ["Break the Silence on Ovarian Cancer" race](#).

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