



LUNG CANCER ALLIANCE

FASHION FORWARD: STIGMA BUSTING IN STYLE IN EGYPT



الجمعية المصرية لدعم مرضى السرطان والمشهرة برقم ٢٥٦١

Maureen Rigney¹, Esraa El Sayad²

¹Lung Cancer Alliance, Washington DC UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ²CanSurvive, Cairo EGYPT

BACKGROUND

In Egypt, misconceptions that cancer is unpreventable and always fatal persist. Often seen as a punishment, it is not uncommon for those diagnosed to be ostracized and even abandoned.

To commemorate World Cancer Day, the first Cancer from Patient's Perspective Summit was held in Cairo February 4, 2016. It culminated in an event that confronted cancer stigma in a revolutionary way: a fashion show with cancer survivors modeling personalized creations by famous Egyptian designers.

PROCESS

An online campaign to engage survivors and fashion designers was launched in October 2015 via CanSurvive's very active Facebook page.

Survivor profiles were added to a password protected Facebook group open only to the fashion designers, who selected a survivor by commenting on her story. Those without an online presence were registered by event organizers.

All interested survivors (n=32) were accepted. Six cancer types were represented, including two lung cancer survivors.

Designs reflected the women's cancer journey. Survivor/designer pairs met an average of four times over two months to discuss and interpret the journey, collaborate on sketches and fittings.

CHALLENGES

- Organizers had to manage designers unhappy with the dress size of their survivor matches
- Some survivors faced opposition to their participation by male relatives and a number dropped out
- A few studios cautioned their designers against participating
- Some designers had to compensate their survivors and provide free outfits so they would wear designs not suitable for future use

IN EACH DESIGN, A STORY

Over 350 of the 450 Summit attendees remained for the "catwalk" finale, moderated by a cancer survivor.



Survivors/designer pairs shared their stories...



then the survivor took her turn on the runway.



The winner was selected by a panel of local regional and international judges who rated each design on a scale of 1 to 10.



Designs ranged from elegant evening dresses...



to dramatic statements...



to the inspirational...



to edgy, theatrical concepts that showed fortitude.



Two survivors wore wedding dresses, one because her fiancée abandoned her after diagnosis and another to symbolize her "marriage" to cancer.



Some were reserved, others were not...



ALL were poignant testimonies to beauty and resilience.



AND THE WINNER IS...

Fatma El Fiq, who dramatically unveiled herself in despair during treatment for leukemia...



then transformed into a butterfly after treatment.



With designer Ahmed El Gyar of Gero Fashion Designs

CONCLUSION

The catwalk proves a movement to confront cancer stigma in the Middle East is underway. Through their participation, these survivor "warriors" raised awareness, gave hope to others and, by telling their stories, challenged misconceptions with strength and grace.

MAUREEN RIGNEY, LICSW
Director of Support Initiatives
mrigney@lungcanceralliance.org
www.lungcanceralliance.org

ESRAA ELSAYED
Executive Manager
esraa@icansurvive.com
http://www.icansurvive.com/