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Advocating for Others

BY LACEY MEYER

At the Colorectal Cancer Coalition's second annual "Call on Congress," a three-day event this past March, Christine LeGrant, a stage 3 colorectal cancer survivor, joined 39 other advocates for training sessions and to meet with their respective representatives (and staffers) on Capitol Hill to urge them to support three pieces of legislation for colorectal cancer screening.

The three bills would not only provide screenings for the low income, the uninsured, and the underinsured not eligible for Medicare, but also expand Medicare coverage to include preprocedure visits. The legislation would also require private insurance plans to cover colorectal cancer screening.

"One of the things that cancer does to you is make you feel helpless, and this is a way of not being helpless," LeGrant says. "It's a way of fighting back because in a way, it's not the cancer that makes you feel helpless—it's not being able to get what you need, not being able to get the colonoscopy when you need it, or not being able to get things paid for."

Diagnosed at age 51, LeGrant says she was lucky—she was at the right age for screening and had great health care coverage. She sees the event as a chance to help others get the same access to the life-saving care she had. The diagnosis brought out the true grassroots activist in LeGrant. She and her husband joke that saving the world is what they do for fun.

LeGrant was joined by friend and new advocate Lucille Anderson, whose daughter Sue died three years after being diagnosed with stage 4 colorectal cancer at age 43. Sue also had good insurance coverage, LeGrant says, but she was thought to be too young to have colorectal cancer and wasn't screened for it. Now, Anderson advocates in Sue's memory.

"We need to fight in people's memory," Anderson says. "We can't forget that things could be different for other people."

Anderson says the proposed legislation is only the beginning. The next step, she says, is to expand screening coverage to people under 50. "It's a long process," Anderson says. "We're engaged in the process of changing the laws so that they protect people with cancer."

Do you know a patient, survivor, or caregiver we should highlight in The Advocate? If so, e-mail your nomination to editor@curetoday.com.