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robin lawrence

FIVE-TIME MELANOMA SURVIVOR, MARKETING DIRECTOR OF THE EVANSVILLE CANCER CENTER IN INDIANA

Melanoma is the sixth-most-common cancer in women, and it can be deadly—almost 3,000 women are expected to die from it this year.

Robin Lawrence knows firsthand how traumatic this disease can be. During a routine skin check in March 2002 her dermatologist found a suspicious-looking growth on her butt and decided to have it biopsied. “When he told me it was a melanoma, I lost it. I thought I wouldn’t live long enough to watch my 15-year-old daughter graduate high school,” she says.

Fortunately, her cancer was caught early enough to remove it surgically, but she was still deeply affected by the experience. “Soon afterward my daughter brought home a student newspaper advocating indoor tanning, and I knew I had to take action,” says Lawrence. And she did: Over the past four years she has conducted more than 300 presentations nationwide, warning students and CEOs alike about the dangers of excessive sun exposure; organized free full-body skin-cancer screenings;

spoken at local health fairs; and distributed sunscreen at area swimming pools. Last July she received the American Academy of Dermatology’s Gold Triangle Award for her efforts in raising skin-cancer awareness.

Lawrence, who’s had four melanomas and 24 biopsies since her initial diagnosis, says she still feels anxious when she looks at all her moles. But she uses that fear—and each cancer crisis—as a catalyst to help others. “If I can encourage even one woman to see her dermatologist more often,” she says, “it will be worth it.”

What she wants you to know Avoid tanning beds at all costs. “Many women believe they are safer than the sun, but research shows they often contain 10 to 15 times more cancer-causing ultraviolet rays.”

Her stay-healthy secret Get annual full-body screenings. As an extra precaution Lawrence’s dermatologist does mole mapping, in which her moles are digitally photographed and stored in a computer. “This way,” she explains, “she has a record to refer to when she sees me.”