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Health-e (Cape Town)

South Africa: Armstrong On a Cancer Stigma Mission

Anso Thom 12 March 2010

Cancer activist and one of history's greatest cyclists Lance Armstrong has called on the 38 000 Argus participants to paint the race yellow on Sunday when they line up for the world's biggest organised cycle race.

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Armstrong on Thursday launched the LIVESTRONG Global Cancer Campaign in Cape Town with a visit to fellow cancer survivors at Grootte Schuur Hospital. The Campaign's work in South Africa will focus on partnering with local patient and cancer advocacy groups to end the stigma around cancer and "turn victims into survivors".



"Cancer is currently one of the most preventable and curable of the major life-threatening diseases. But research shows that many of the 12 million people who will be diagnosed with cancer this year will hide their diagnosis, will be isolated by their communities, will be pushed out of family and social circles and will face a lonely and painful fight for their lives," said Armstrong.

"The stigma leads to a lack of early detection, failure to seek treatment and an increase in cancer mortality. We must put an end to the suffering caused by stigma," he added.

Over the course of this year, LIVESTRONG will launch two major efforts in South Africa. The first is a nationwide initiative to reduce the stigma associated with cancer and raise awareness of the tragic toll the disease takes throughout the world. By partnering with local cancer organisations and encouraging survivors to tell stories, LIVESTRONG will offer the knowledge and resources local organisations need to successfully confront fears and misconceptions.

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LIVESTRONG will also launch a patient empowerment initiative, in collaboration with the American Cancer Society and other local organisations. They will bring together decision makers, clinicians, media, advocates and patients to work towards a system of care that puts the patient

first. This effort will turn statistics into stories, bring visibility to gaps in cancer control and highlight the need for cancer to be a stronger priority on a country's health agenda.

Cyclists have been invited to wear yellow on race day and gather at the LIVESTRONG Power Zone, a one kilometer stretch located at Suikerbossie.

Latest cancer statistics reveal that between 1993 and 2005, deaths due to all cancers in women in South Africa increased by more than 80 percent. Between 1993 and 2005, deaths due to cancer in men in the country increased by 45 percent.

Rates of cervical cancer incidence in South Africa are among the highest on the continent.

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