

Hello again and welcome back for more As It Is. I'm June Simms with Mario Ritter in Washington.

Theater has been used over the years to help people learn about everything from AIDS to mental health issues. Now there is a play aimed at helping doctors and other medical workers understand their patients with breast cancer. Mario Ritter has that report.

Theater Helps Doctors, Nurses Understand Breast Cancer Patients

It is the news that no woman ever wants to hear:

"You have invasive breast cancer."

While this is only a play, the discovery of breast cancer can be crushing for many women. Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in women worldwide.

Zulima Palacio is a breast cancer patient in the United States. She well remembers the shock when her doctor gave her the results of her biopsy.

"The first time she told me, I was numb, completely like, Huh? Like, I don't get it. Not me. This is something that happens to other people, not me."

Ms. Palacio has the support of her husband, friends, sympathetic nurses and doctors she trusts. But not all breast cancer patients have that.

The University of Missouri is taking action to help with a play called "Breast Cancer Dialogues."

"Are you still sore ((angry))?"

"Not at you."

One goal is to help medical students, doctors and their aides be more open to the needs of their patients.

"Where are you going?"

"I have to go to work."

"Well I wasn't out eating tea and crumpets."

The play is based on real life experiences. Dr. James Campbell says letting students act through the sometimes harsh reality does make a difference.

“When students are first starting out as future physicians, they learn that it's important to establish a relationship and rapport with their patient and to be able to communicate effectively.”

Just as important as the script is the fact that theater-goers can rewrite it to enable a more caring interaction between patient and doctor. Rachel Baur coordinates the productions.

“That’s one of the things we do with interactive theatre, is when they ((the audience)) see something they don’t like, they yell ‘stop!’ And we stop the scene, and then they can intervene, and that is where we get the most feedback from audiences of saying ‘no, that can’t happen. I won’t let this happen to this patient.’”

“Your chances of survival are much better than they would have been 20 years ago. Why, back then you would have been a goner.”

What the doctor could have said in a better way is that 70 percent of women who get breast cancer can be cured, if they begin treatment early.

Zulima Palacio has undergone chemotherapy and surgery since she was first diagnosed with stage three breast cancer in April. She is now cancer free.

Dr. Anne Favret is an oncologist who oversees Palacio's treatment. She works at a practice called Virginia Cancer Specialists. She says even patients with more advanced breast cancer can lead fairly normal lives.

"I've been here now 13 years and I have women with metastatic, incurable breast cancer with a good quality of life, raising their children, going to work, paying their taxes, for ten or more years. We cure over 70 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer."

Dr. Negar Golesorkhi is a breast cancer specialist and a surgeon. She says breast surgery has also improved.

"We don't necessarily always have to remove the breast. We never remove the muscle. We don't always remove all the lymph nodes so we can go from those type of very large, deforming surgeries that didn't affect survival at all to a much more tailored type of surgery."

The American Cancer Society says those whose breast cancer is caught early have survival rates from 80 to more than 90 percent. Even those with more advanced cancer like Zulima Palacio have good survival rates. That is why women and men need to see a physician as soon as they notice any change in their breasts. It could save their lives. I'm Mario Ritter.

And I'm June Simms. You are listening to As It Is, from VOA Learning English.

Young Musicians in Houston Carry on Blues Tradition

American blues music began in the early part of the 20th century among African-Americans in the Southern United States. The music was very popular in places like Memphis, Tennessee, The Mississippi River Delta and the fields of east Texas. Now, many young people are rediscovering the blues. Today we look at two such artists in Houston, Texas.

One of the most popular young blues artists in Houston is Josh Davidson, known as The Mighty Orq. He views this American-born music as a national treasure.

"It is awesome, man. It is a beautiful thing, you know -- something to be celebrated and enjoyed."

The Mighty Orq has learned the styles of famous blues singers like BB King, Muddy Waters, and the city's most celebrated blues man, the late Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins -- the king of the Houston Blues Society.

"I think the real magic of blues music is that it speaks to everyone. It really speaks to, I mean it just speaks to the humanity of everybody."

That is because the blues flows from deep human emotions. So says Annika Chambers, another one of Houston's popular young blues artists.

“It takes over you. It can take over in different ways, so whatever the blues is it’s something you just feel deep down in your soul.”

Although the blues started as an African-American musical form and was once termed “race music,” Annika Chambers says her band members and listeners are a sign of how things have changed.

“Music is universal, so it brings us all together at some point, whether it is black or white. I play at a lot of shows and I get a mixed crowd at all of my shows.”

Annika Chambers and The Mighty Orq praise Houston's supportive blues community. It is made up of musicians, fans, radio program hosts and club owners who often open up their establishments for blues concerts.

“There is just a sense of community and camaraderie that is really wonderful, you know, and then you have venues in different parts of the city that are sort of hubs for the community and for the musicians.”

Both the Mighty Orq and Annika Chambers have recorded CDs that are helping to spread the news about Houston's rich blues heritage.

That is As It Is. Thanks for sharing your day with us. VOA world news is coming up at the beginning of the hour, Universal Time. Enjoy your weekend!