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Brain Tumor Survivor Finds Strength, Inspiration In Kennedy

Treatment Options Remain Scarce One Year After Senator's Diagnosis

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BOSTON -- One year ago this May, the scene of Sen. Edward Kennedy being whisked away in a medical helicopter shocked his family, his home state and the nation's capitol.

A year later, Kennedy has defied predictions, remaining strong and actively involved in the push for national health reform.

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"He is living his passion," said Deb DeMella, of Arlington. DeMella was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1991, when she was 36 and the mother of three young children.

"Life is uncertain. It's uncertain for all of us," she said. "I've surpassed the statistics, and no, I didn't really think I'd be living this long. I am so grateful, I'm so grateful."

DeMella's diagnosis became a catalyst for change in her life. She returned to school to learn, and eventually teach healing therapies to compliment traditional medical treatments. She founded the "Brainstormers" support group for fellow brain tumor patients, and to this day leads a variety of support groups to help other cancer patients live with the uncertainty of disease.

"It's frightening. Sometimes it's really frightening. We don't know what the outcome is. A cancer diagnosis does not mean we know when we're going to die," she said.

Kennedy and his doctors have been silent on what, if any, current treatments he is receiving.

Researchers continue to toil, struggling to give brain tumor survivors more options to live longer. Just this month, a drug called Avastin was approved by the Food and Drug Administration as a last option for glioblastoma patients. Despite that approval, options remain scarce.

"I see him persevering and doing the best that he can in spite of all these challenges," said DeMella of Kennedy. "He's an inspiration."

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