LaSalle D. Leffall, Jr., M.D., First African American President of the American Cancer Society, 1930-2019



LaSalle D. Leffall, Jr., MD, FACS, former president and Honorary Life Member of the American Cancer Society, passed away on May 25. Below is a comment from **Gary Reedy, chief executive officer.**

"Dr. Leffall was a renowned surgeon, oncologist, and medical school professor. He devoted his life to the study of cancer, particularly how it impacts black men and women.

"Dr. Leffall was a visionary leader. He was the first black president of the American Cancer Society, serving from 1978-1979. He began volunteering for ACS in the 1960s, during the civil rights era. It was during this time that he called upon our organization to “meet the challenge of cancer among black Americans” by focusing on disparities between black and white Americans in cancer prevalence, treatment, and mortality. During his tenure as president, he introduced a program to address the cancer burden among black Americans, focusing on incidence and mortality. He was named an Honorary Life Member in 1987. He received the American Cancer Society’s Outstanding Young Man of the Year Award in 1965 and the Distinguished Service Award in 1984.

"Dr. Leffall joined the faculty of Howard University in 1962. He later became chair of the Department of Surgery, a position he held for 25 years. He was the Charles R. Drew Professor of Surgery and served as a senior advisor to Howard University President Wayne A. I. Frederick, MD, MBA, FACS.

"A resolution honoring Dr. Leffall and his work will be presented to the American Cancer Society Board of Directors at its August meeting.

"Dr. Leffall’s challenge to the American Cancer Society – that we do more to address cancer disparities – continues to inspire our health equity efforts today. I know you join me in remembering this truly great man and his significant contributions to our cause, and in offering our sincere condolences to his family.

"On a personal note, I had the honor and privilege of both knowing and working with LaSalle. He was a kind and caring man and one of the most eloquent public speakers I have known. I remember fondly when LaSalle told me that the goal for living was to die young at the oldest possible age. LaSalle achieved his goal."