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Actress Colleen Zenk Pinter Partners with the Oral Cancer Foundation to Raise Public Awareness

Two time Emmy nominated actress Colleen Zenk Pinter, best known for her long running role as Barbara Ryan on CBS's *As the World Turns*, has teamed up with the Oral Cancer Foundation to share the story of her battle against oral cancer, and raise public awareness of a disease which kills more Americans each year than more commonly known cancers.

Zenk Pinter's first stop was CBS's *The Early Show*. In an interview with co-anchor Hannah Storm, Zenk Pinter revealed how a seemingly stubborn canker sore turned out to be a stage-two malignant oral cancer, requiring several surgeries to reconstruct her tongue, and months of radiation treatments. Zenk Pinter explained to Storm that she believes that her cancer was caused by the human papillomavirus. "I had absolutely none of the historic risk factors for this cancer, I never used tobacco and only drank socially," she said, referring to the two other common causes of the disease.

"In fact, young Americans who have none of the historic risk factors are the fastest growing segment of oral cancer patients in the country," Brian Hill, executive director of the Oral Cancer Foundation says, "and we believe the culprit behind the surge in cases is HPV16, the same virus that causes cervical cancer."

Dr. Mark Lingen, Professor of Pathology at the University of Chicago School of Medicine says, "Colleen was very typical of most Americans in their lack of knowledge of oral cancer. Awareness and routine screening is particularly important, since early discovery is directly correlated to positive outcomes from treatment." HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States. At least 50 percent of American adults will acquire the virus at some point in their lives. HPV16, one of the most destructive strains of the virus, was definitively linked to oral cancer in 2001. Research has also established that the virus, which can easily be transferred, may even be a more significant risk factor than tobacco in the younger portion of the population.

"Colleen is an amazing woman", said Hill. "Even BEFORE she had begun her treatments for the cancer, she contacted me and wanted to become an advocate for early detection and increased awareness. She was clearly taken by surprise to have developed this cancer. Most people at that point in the process are only thinking of themselves, and getting through the really tough treatments successfully. Her willingness to talk publicly about her very personal and painful battle with oral cancer is certainly courageous, and the desire to help others is palpable when you speak with her. Her story and high profile celebrity as a well-known TV actress will have enormous impact educating the public about this deadly and disfiguring disease. This is one of the purest examples of altruistic, celebrity power being used to better other people's lives. We are lucky to have this partnership with Colleen."

Now cancer-free, Zenk Pinter urged viewers of *The Early Show* to get regular oral cancer screenings. "Your dentist should be doing an oral cancer exam at every visit," Zenk Pinter said. "It's a simple 5 minute, painless exam that may save your life."

The Early Show was only the first of what is on the public awareness schedule for Zenk Pinter. A recent interview with Soap Opera Digest is already on the newsstands, and interviews with other magazines have been scheduled. In December she will film a TV Public Service Announcement on the need for early detection through annual screenings. OCF will distribute the PSA to TV stations across the country at the beginning of 2008.

About Colleen Zenk Pinter

Ms. Zenk Pinter has worked professionally since the age of nine as an actress. Besides her long time association with *As the World Turns*, in which she has appeared in over 2500 episodes, Colleen made her Broadway debut in *Bring Back Birdie*. Her film debut was in John Huston's adaptation of *Annie*. Her benevolent and philanthropic association with health causes is not new, and for decades she has donated time to work with the Easter Seals, the March of Dimes, the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and Bread to Roses, one of the first AIDS hospice programs. For more information about Colleen's background, go to <http://www.astheworldturns.net>

The Oral Cancer Foundation, founded in 2000, is a national non-profit charity based in California. The foundation advocates for better public understanding of the disease and engages the medical and dental communities to be more involved in early detection. The foundation maintains a Web site with information for patients, the public, and health care providers at www.oralcancerfoundation.org. It is supported through tax-deductible public donations which can be made at <http://www.oralcancerfoundation.org/membership/membership.htm>