Farrah Had Anal Cancer?!

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Not surprisingly perhaps, I loved “Charlie’s Angels” for all its campy qualities. I wasn’t physically attracted to Farrah Fawcett Majors (I know it’s just Farrah Fawcett now, but it’s still a reflex of mine to call her by her married name--you know, when she was married to Lee Majors of “The Six Million Dollar Man”). However, I did find her captivating, in the way only a gay boy could.

As the years went by, I must admit that I never really kept up with all of the ins and outs of her life. I knew what surfaced to the headlines, as a good news addict should. So I was greatly surprised--and a bit embarrassed--when I finally read on Advocate.com that Farrah had died of anal cancer. I was surprised because I had missed the “anal” part of the phrase “anal cancer” in all the previous coverage of her illness. I was embarrassed not about the kind of cancer, but that I had been so inattentive to such an important detail.

But then I stopped being embarrassed and started being curious. Was I the only one who didn’t know? My extremely unscientific “poll” (I asked a few people) made me feel better. One person knew years ago that Farrah had anal cancer. The rest had no clue until the coverage of her passing. What does that mean, if anything?

Without doing an analysis of the coverage, it’s unfair of me to say with any certainty that the media deliberately avoided using the word “anal” when describing her cancer. However, I don’t think it’s unfair of me to say that my gut tells me that if an analysis were to be made of the coverage of her cancer that we might find the word “anal” was omitted more often than it was included. I would hope that such an analysis would find that the LGBT media was better in using the word “anal” versus the mainstream media.

Breast cancer and prostate cancer were taboo topics not even a few generations ago, but society--and the media--got over the giggle factor (for the most part) on those diseases. For obvious reasons, the fact that anal cancer is surrounded with stigma should surprise no one. It remains rare, but it is a real disease that kills real people. The irony of anal cancer taking the life of a sex symbol will hopefully start the destigmatization process.

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