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March 31, 2009 10:00 AM Eastern Daylight Time 

Lupus Foundation of America (LFA) Applauds Launch of New Lupus Awareness Campaign

LFA Spokesperson Mercedes Yvette Helps Launch Campaign

WASHINGTON--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))--The Lupus Foundation of America (LFA) applauds the Ad Council and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health (OWH) on the launch today of a new national campaign on lupus. The LFA was the Founding Partner with the OWH for the first-ever Ad Council campaign on lupus, directed toward individuals most at risk for developing the disease – young women of childbearing age.

LFA national spokesperson, actress/model Mercedes Yvette, participated in media interviews and a kick-off event for the campaign held at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services this morning. In 2004, as a contestant and runner-up on *America's Next Top Model*, Mercedes revealed to a nationwide television audience that she has lupus. Since assuming her role with the LFA, Mercedes has participated in several national television appearances to promote awareness of lupus, and joined with other lupus advocates on Capitol Hill to seek increased federal funding for research on lupus.

"I am honored to be a part of the campaign and help raise awareness of a disease that has long been overshadowed and overlooked," said Mercedes Yvette, LFA spokesperson and actress/model. "I also want to represent a positive image to others with lupus, and encourage them to lead a full and productive life, and strive for their goals despite the many challenges of living with lupus."

A national poll conducted for the Ad Council revealed that 80 percent of Americans know little or nothing about lupus, or its potentially devastating health effects, demonstrating the necessity and urgency of the campaign. In addition, a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report showed deaths attributed to lupus increased 60 percent over a 20-year period, with the largest increase among African American women. The CDC report found that one-third of deaths occurred among individuals younger than 45 years of age, and suggested increased awareness of lupus, early diagnosis, and treatment of the disease can reduce the number of lupus-related deaths.

"The Ad Council campaign addresses the critical need to raise awareness among the public about lupus, and ultimately increase early diagnosis to

prevent the life-threatening consequences of lupus,” said Sandra C. Raymond, LFA President and CEO. “We are thrilled to be a part of this campaign and congratulate the OWH and the Ad Council on this exciting achievement.”

Lupus is an acute and chronic (lifelong) autoimmune disease in which the immune system is unbalanced, causing inflammation and tissue damage to virtually every organ system in the body. Its health consequences may include heart attacks, strokes, seizures, or organ failure. More than 90 percent of the people with lupus are women. Lupus is two to three times more common among African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians – a disparity that remains unexplained.

More than half of the people with lupus suffered from symptoms for four or more years before they were diagnosed. The campaign message, “Could I have lupus?” urges individuals who may be experiencing symptoms to ask their doctor about lupus. The campaign has a website, couldihavelupus.gov, that provides information about lupus symptoms and health effects and personal stories submitted by women affected by lupus.

“Sometimes people with lupus can become very ill without realizing it,” said Joan Merrill, M.D., LFA Medical Director. “This can lead to damage in vital organs such as the kidneys, the heart, the lungs or the brain. Public awareness about lupus is critical to getting people properly diagnosed and treated earlier in the course of disease, before permanent damage occurs. It has been very difficult to get new treatments developed for lupus but there is some progress, and we need to get people access to current information about what is available and what is being studied to try to improve the treatments.”

The LFA has expanded its online resources to include an interactive tool and symptom checklist, launched a new education series of booklets and fact sheets, and enhanced its network of health educators to meet an expected increase in the number of people seeking information and services as a result of the campaign. Working with renowned lupus experts, the LFA has compiled the latest information to answer questions about symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment options. Our nationwide network of chapters will also conduct outreach on a local level to raise awareness of the campaign within their communities.

The LFA website, www.lupus.org, has an extensive library of free online resources, including transcripts from webchats with lupus experts, message boards, and newsletters. To obtain free information on lupus symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment options by mail, call the LFA toll-free at 1-888-38LUPUS (888-385-8787) or contact the nearest LFA office. A list of offices appears on the LFA website.

About the Lupus Foundation of America

The LFA is the foremost national nonprofit voluntary health organization dedicated to finding the causes of and cure for lupus, and providing support, services, and hope to all people affected by lupus. Founded in 1977, the LFA has a nationwide network of nearly 300 chapters and support groups and operates programs of research, education, and advocacy.

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