

'Grey's Anatomy' star promotes birth control

By Jennifer Tramm | Published 10/30/06 10:00pm

An actress from television's "'Grey's Anatomy'" touted Planned Parenthood this weekend, sharing her experiences with the organization.

Kate Walsh, the featured speaker at the "'Love Your Anatomy'" fundraiser for Planned Parenthood of Southern Arizona, said she has been a customer of Planned Parenthood herself.

At Saturday's event at Club Congress, Walsh said while her mother's only advice was, "'Whatever you do, don't get pregnant,'" her stepfather would drive her to Planned Parenthood to get birth control pills.

Although Walsh said she asked her stepfather, the "'safer parent,'" never to tell her mother about it, he ended up telling her mother, who subsequently overreacted.



Kate Walsh

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- Rachel Chánes,
Planned Parenthood

never graduated from the UA, leaving to become an actress. She began her career at the a.k.a. Theater in downtown Tucson.

"'I always went to Planned Parenthood to get my birth control pills and to get my check ups and my pap smears and annuals, so there's a little soft spot in my heart for them,'" Walsh said.

Walsh, who plays a gynecologist on "'Grey's Anatomy,'" said she was impressed by a Tucson teen advisory group at Planned Parenthood who advise other teens about sexual health, an uncommon topic for teens.

"'We don't have a culture that talks about (sex education),'"' Walsh said.

Walsh, who sits on the Board of Advocates for Planned Parenthood, said the the organization provides some of the best medical care for women, and some of the money that comes from medical exam fees and donations goes to they help subsidize care for women who are in need and have no money to get exams.

The organization is necessary, "'particularly with the country's political, social, psychological, emotional, crazy environment,'" she said.

"'Planned Parenthood was there for me,'" Walsh said. "'And not just when I first became sexually active, but when I moved and was a starting actor in Chicago and in New York.'"

Walsh, who was raised in Tucson, said she

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The audience agreed with applause, with one attendee shouting, "Right on!"

Walsh also extolled the virtues of finding out about sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy risks at Planned Parenthood's Web site, www.ppsaz.org, as well as getting the HPV vaccine.

Walsh said she was impressed by Planned Parenthood's emergency contraception kit that people can buy and keep at home.

"If we have an earthquake kit, why not an emergency contraception kit?" asked Walsh. "If a condom breaks, you miss your pills or, God forbid, there's a sexual assault, you've got something there."

Planned Parenthood is starting a new test marketing campaign called "Real Life, Real Talk," in which the organization goes out to talk with kids and parents about why sex is still a taboo topic and why kids "don't want to destroy the mood by whipping out a condom."

At the fundraiser, Walsh said the money donated to Planned Parenthood goes to good use.

"Thirty-six bucks buys birth control for a needy teen for three months," she said.

Walsh also discussed the role of pop culture in the lives of young people in American when it comes to sex. She said the arts are a "powerful" way to get a message out.

"We are so inundated with reality television, with people eating worms for money," Walsh said, that we could put socially relevant issues in the storylines of shows like "Grey's Anatomy" and still make it "entertaining, funny, dramatic and hopefully interesting."

After the speech, Walsh met and talked with several members of the audience.

One of the handful of men in the audience, Tucson businessman Mario Raso, said he came to the talk because he was interested in Planned Parenthood's cause.

"I think it's great of (Walsh) to be supportive of Planned Parenthood," Raso said.

Tina Perez, who works for a local talent agency, said it is time the celebrities support Planned Parenthood.

"The fact that she would come here to promote something locally, I have a lot of respect for that," Perez said.

Rachel Chánes, Planned Parenthood's vice president of medical service, said the organization wanted to do this event to re-introduce itself to the community.

"A huge wakeup call was when we learned (from research over the past year) that while we still enjoy high brand favorability, there's a whole generation of people that don't know what we do or have a very limited idea of what we do," Chánes said.

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