Changing Cultural Beliefs Contributing to Breast Cancer Deaths

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Breast cancer deadlier for blacks

Why? Report blames racism, says mammograms, care may be inferior

BY JIM RITTER
Health Reporter

African-American women in Chicago are much more likely than white women to die of breast cancer, and the racial gap is widening, according to a new study that calls the disparity “morally wrong, medically unacceptable and reversible.”

Just 10 years ago, black and white women in Chicago died at the same rate from breast cancer. But the most recent figures available, for 2003, show the mortality rate among black women was 73 percent higher, researchers at Mount Sinai Hospital’s Urban Health Institute report in a study being released today. Nationwide, the gap was about half that — 37 percent.

The disparity in death rates appears to be the result of racism, “and it appears to be institutionalized,” said Alan Channing, chief executive of Sinai Health System.

In Chicago, white women are diagnosed with breast cancer at a rate 15 percent higher than the rate in black women. So why are more blacks dying from the disease?

One site spotted few cancers

One explanation that’s been offered is that African-American women might be subject to worse care.

Lillie Bell of Chicago, photographed Monday at her West Side home, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1999. The cancer was relatively advanced, even though Bell had been getting mammograms for years, she said. A.J. PODGORSKI/SUN-TIMES

1999: Bell was diagnosed with breast cancer. In 2003, she was diagnosed with colon cancer.

Age-Adjusted Female Breast Cancer Mortality for Chicago, Per 100,000 Population
Study 1.
Cultural Beliefs about Breast Cancer

*Can they be deadly?*
We developed a 15-item instrument to measure beliefs that would be barriers to:

- Participation in Screening
- Diagnosis of Suspicious Breast Symptoms
- Follow through with Treatment
Cultural Beliefs

**Characteristics of Breast Lumps**
- Only painful breast lumps are cancer.
- Only breast lumps that grow are cancer.
- If you touch or press a breast lump, it will become cancer.

**Self-Help Techniques**
- Worrying about breast cancer makes you more likely to get it.
- If you take good care of yourself, you won’t get breast cancer.
- “Natural” remedies can get rid of breast lumps.
Faith-Based Beliefs

- If a woman has enough faith in God, she won’t need treatment for breast cancer.
- Faith in God can protect you from breast cancer.
- If you pray enough, sometimes breast lumps will disappear.

Futility of Treatment

- If breast cancer is cut open in surgery, it will grow faster.
- If a woman is poor, she won’t get cured, because she won’t get the best treatment.
- If you get cancer, it will kill you sooner or later.
Newly diagnosed breast cancer patients (n = 954)

Cultural beliefs were associated with:

- Breast cancer *detected with symptoms*, rather than mammogram.

- *Longer delay* (3+ months) before seeking diagnosis of suspicious symptoms.

- *Later stage of cancer* at diagnosis (Stage 2,3,4 vs 0,1).

- * Longer delay* (3+ months) in starting cancer treatment.
Misconceptions predict timing of care and later stage

Symptomatic detection
P = .0185

>90 days to medical presentation
P = .0038

>90 days to treatment
P = .0003

>90 days total delay
P < .0001

Later stage
P = .0099

Later stage (invasive)
P = .0942
Study 2.
Beating Breast Cancer Program

*Can cultural beliefs about breast cancer be changed?*
Beating Breast Cancer DVD

An inspirational film designed to promote early detection through screening, and also provide hope for women diagnosed with breast cancer. Five African American women, all breast cancer survivors, share from their hearts in their own words. (14 minutes)

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Beating Breast Cancer DVD

• Five African American women, all breast cancer survivors, are featured in the film.

• Unscripted; each woman tells her story in her own words.

• Addresses cultural beliefs and fear, which were identified as significant barriers in our earlier research.

• One of the featured survivors is a physician, and so provides the credibility of a medical expert.

- Professional production company
"What about your male friends? How are they going to look at you? And I looked at him and I said, 'It's not about them. It's about me. I'm still a woman...and I'm focusing on living."

Tasha, age 37
• Endorsed by the American Cancer Society.

• Endorsed by Chicago Department of Public Health.

• National Telly Award, Health and Wellness Category for short film, 2011.

  ▪ YouTube 2,015 views to date.
Evaluation of DVD

- 262 African American women participants
- Questionnaires completed (all within one continuous session):
  1. Before watching DVD
  2. Immediately following DVD
  3. After Q & A with African American nurse
Lump is not painful, it's not cancer
Lump doesn’t get bigger, it’s not cancer
Lump is pressed often, turn out to be BC
Women with large breasts more likely to get BC
More you worry about BC, more likely to get it
Take good care of yourself, won’t get BC
Mammograms can cause BC
BC is cut open in surgery, it will grow faster
No BC in your family, don’t need a mam
Only need to get a mam if you find a problem
A poor woman won’t get cured from cancer, because she won’t ge...
If BC is treated correctly, it can be cured
Faith in God can protect you from BC
Pray enough, breast lumps will disappear
A “natural” remedy can get rid of breast lumps

Mean
Time 1
Time 2
Time 3
Responses to Beating Breast Cancer DVD:

• 99% thought the DVD was worth watching
• 89% stated they learned something new from the DVD
• *86% reported that the DVD helped them to decide to get a mammogram.*
Dissemination: Beating Breast Cancer DVD

- **440 educational events** have been held in the four target communities.
- **8,503 women** have attended events and completed questionnaires.
- **461 women** were given one-on-one help to find a mammogram they could afford (free).
- Almost all women were African American (94%), so we reached the intended audience.
Dissemination: Beating Breast Cancer DVD

• Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program – (lead agencies)
• Michigan Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (lead agencies)
• Nationally through the National Black Nurses Association (chapter presidents)
CONCLUSIONS

- First study (we know of) demonstrating that cultural beliefs about breast cancer can be changed by viewing a short film on DVD.

- DVD provides a simple, cost-effective technique that can be easily used for wide dissemination.
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THANK YOU!!