Using Electronic Media to Communicate Breast Cancer Risk Information to Young African American Women

Neasha Graves, MPA; Kathleen Gray, MSPH; Melissa Troester, PhD; Liza Makowski, PhD; Brad Hemminger, PhD; Michael Head; Grace Shin
UNC Chapel Hill Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Program and UNC Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science

Young African American women are disproportionately affected by breast cancer with **higher diagnosis rates at age 40 and younger** and **greater susceptibility to basal-like breast cancer**. Few young women are aware of breast cancer risk factors, and there are limited electronic resources on breast cancer and black women. The UNC Chapel Hill Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Program is partnering with the UNC School of Information and Library Science to develop culturally appropriate, convenient and interactive web-based educational tool that will provide emerging science on breast cancer risk to this population of women.

Introducing Emerging Breast Cancer Science

• Basal-like breast cancer is a subtype of breast cancer that is more aggressive, fast growing and more prevalent among premenopausal African American women. Pregnancies and obesity are mechanisms for susceptibility being studied by researchers in UNC BCERP.

• After sharing the epidemiology of basal-like breast cancer with its Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and receiving their feedback, UNC BCERP staff sought opportunities to develop educational tools tailored for African American women that convey breast cancer risk and how epidemiological studies are used to assess risk.

Recognizing the Education Needs of Young Black Women

• To further comprehend the education needs of young African American women, the UNC BCERP Community Partner conducted focus group discussions with 57 women ages 18 to 49.

• Key themes from the discussions surfaced, providing the impetus for tailored educational materials for young African American women and their primary care providers:
  • The Internet, television, acquaintances, physicians and survivors are tools for learning breast health information.
  • Messaging about breast cancer doesn’t reflect African American women, so they don’t think it is a disease that affects them.
  • There is little concern among young African American women about their risk for breast cancer.

Using Technology to Share Key Messages about Risk

• Despite feedback from women that they gather health information from the Internet, there are few electronic learning tools that address breast cancer in African American women, including basal-like breast cancer.

• UNC BCERP is collaborating with experts in the UNC School of Information and Library Science to develop and pilot a **web-based tool** aimed at educating young black women about breast cancer risk.

• To aid in building a tool that accommodates the need for frequent and convenient access to breast health information, staff will **survey the target audience** to learn more about their use of specific technology as it relates to seeking health information.

• Currently under production, the tool will feature **videos of African American breast cancer survivors and physicians**, addressing African American women’s perceptions of breast cancer as a white woman’s disease and claims of inconsistent messaging from health care providers. **Built-in analytics** will also be incorporated, allowing staff to capture background information on the web tool’s users.

The UNC Chapel Hill Breast Cancer and the Environment Research Program (BCERP) is conducting a five-year study aimed at understanding environmental influences, such as obesity, on young African American women’s susceptibility to basal-like breast cancer. Staff in the UNC Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility collaborates with UNC BCERP researchers to develop educational materials that communicate breast cancer risk to this targeted population. Funding is provided by NIEHS, Grants U01ES019472, 3 U01 ES019472-04S1, and P30ES010126.