

HEALTH

# Study probes black, white cancer rates

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

ATLANTA — Unequal access to health care only partly explains why the breast cancer death rate is higher among black women than among whites, a new study suggests.

The study was conducted at military hospitals, where supposedly everybody has the same access to treatment, and found that among the military women, the black-white gap in the breast-cancer death rate was much smaller than it is among women in the general population.

But the gap still existed — black women with breast cancer were still more likely to die than white women with the disease.

The study was published in Wednesday's

issue of the journal *Cancer*.

Researchers have long recognized black women's higher death rate from breast cancer and have speculated that the factors could include not only inadequate access to health care, but also genetics, diet, culture and lifestyle differences, such as use of alcohol and tobacco.

Researchers at the Army Medical Department Center and School at Fort Sam Houston compared military medical records of 6,577 women, 698 of whom were black, who were diagnosed with breast cancer between 1975 and 1994.

They found the five-year mortality rate for

black women was 24.77 percent, compared with 18.08 percent for white women. Among women in general, the mortality rate for black women was 34.2 percent compared with 18.4 percent for white women.

The study did not include data on whether the women had mammograms.

The researchers now are analyzing the use of mammograms and other factors that could have contributed to the disparity.

Dr. Barbara Wojcik, the lead researcher on the study and a civilian physician with the Army at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, backed the study's findings, citing the roughly equal income, living conditions and education levels for military

women.

Dr. Harold Freeman, director of surgery at New York's Harlem Hospital Center and chairman of the President's Cancer Panel, said it's possible the black women did not receive the same treatment as white women.

He said researchers should ask whether there are cultural and psychological differences that would lead white and black women to seek medical help at different times, and whether breast cancer is biologically different between the races.

"I think we're going to find that we need to go deeper than the classification of race to find these answers," Freeman said.

## New psoriasis treatment tested at Baylor and VAMC

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

HOUSTON — A custom-designed medication improved or cleared psoriasis in two-thirds of the patients studied.

"This new topical cream, called Tazorac, is designed to interact with specific parts of the cells found in psoriasis and to turn them off," said Dr. Ted Rosen, the dermatologist in charge of the study at Baylor College of Medicine and the

Houston Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Psoriasis, a hereditary skin disease with no cure, is characterized by red, scaly and flaky patches of thickened skin usually found on the elbows, knees and scalp.

"This drug is not a cure, but it is an excellent treatment option," Rosen said. "Many patients will remain improved or totally clear for as long as

three to six months."

The treatment, approved by the Food and Drug Administration in February, is applied daily until the psoriasis improves or clears and can be stopped until the psoriasis reappears.

The drug attacks psoriasis' skin cell overgrowth by targeting receptors in the skin that react with retinoids, or vitamin A-like compounds.

"The retinoid receptors are responsible for the skin cells' multiplication and growth. By blocking the receptors, the uncontrolled growth seen in psoriasis can be stopped," Rosen said. When the medication reacts with the skin cell process, the scales begin to fade, the thickened areas thin out and the redness disappears.

"For the two-thirds of patients who respond well to

the treatment, the result is normal-looking skin with perhaps a slight pink discoloration," Rosen said.

Although some patients experience skin irritation as a side effect, Rosen says that problem can be addressed by using a lower concentration of cream or by combining the medication with low-potency topical steroids.

He recommends the new

medication for patients who have not been satisfied with conventional treatments such as oral medications, ultraviolet light therapy, topical steroids or topical tar-containing compounds.

"The success of this first custom-designed drug opens the door for other drugs designed to attack the mechanism of psoriasis," Rosen said.

### "LIFE ABUNDANTLY"

## Healthcare revolution: Take responsibility for total health

By Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

October 16, 1995 is a day that will forever live in the history of black America and come to think of it, white America too. Not only was the Million Man March which took place in Washington, DC the biggest black event that has ever occurred in the history of this country, it was the biggest event period. More than 2.2 million black men responded to the call of the Honorable Louis Farrakhan to march with him, not making a demand on the government, but making a demand on self to do better and be more responsible in our duties as fathers, brothers, sons and husbands.

The theme of the day, as everyone remembers was "Atonement, Reconciliation and Responsibility." It was a rare moment in history when it seemed as though time stood still and history itself took a deep breath, taking an introspective look back to see what mistakes had been made (atonement) and then looking towards the future and taking responsibility for what must be done. One of the key themes that was struck by speaker after speaker, especially the Honorable Louis Farrakhan, was the taking of responsibility of black men for themselves, their family, their community and their nation.


Reflecting on this theme, it can be noted that you really cannot take responsibility for what you don't claim. This is a very important point to consider for a people who once were held as slaves. When we were slaves, someone else claimed ownership over us and hence had the responsibility for us.

By the same logic, if we today claim ownership of ourselves, then we must take responsibility for ourselves. Are you with me so far? So, the Million Man March was a day of rising consciousness where we consciously claimed ownership and responsibility for ourselves, our families and our communities.

Well, who or what is this self that we claim ownership of and responsibility for? Each self is composed of body, mind, emotions and spirit. We all are a part of families, that taken collectively constitute community and nation. It is this totality, from the individual to the nation, that we claim ownership of and responsibility for.

So, what does all of this high sounding philosophizing have to do with health? Well, it follows that if I claim ownership of my own body for example, then I have to claim responsibility for the maintenance of my body and likewise my mind. I have to take responsibility for it, which means that I have to take responsibility for its proper functioning and continued health, because I need

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