

HEALTH

Race may be factor in breast cancer survival

Special to Sentinel-Voice

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) — Black women with breast cancer fare more poorly than white women: they are less likely to be cured and likely to die more quickly, according to two University of Louisville researchers.

"Basically, it's like a triple whammy for women of color," said Dr. John Gamel, one of the authors of the report appearing in August's edition of the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*.

Gamel and his partner, Dr. Michael Edwards, concluded that race itself somehow affects the biology of breast cancer and the likelihood of being cured, although they aren't sure just how.

"What we found is that the patient's race has an impact on survival," Edwards said in written remarks. "The reasons are unclear."

The two researchers statistically analyzed more than 100,000 breast cancer cases from a National Cancer Institute data base.

Black women consistently came out worse than white women, even when Gamel and Edwards adjusted for the fact that blacks usually are diagnosed in the more advanced stages of breast cancer.

While breast cancer rates for white women have been falling since 1990, mortality rates for black women have remained at 27.5 deaths per 100,000 per year.

Gamel and Edwards say more study is needed. Gamel said University of Louisville's results strengthen the case for more aggressive programs to encourage black women to get regular mammograms and routinely to do breast

self-examinations.

One Lexington program is already doing just that.

Since 1995 the Sister to Sister program has been reaching out to inner-city women in Lexington with information about breast mammograms and Pap tests as a hedge against breast and cervical cancer.

The program relies on women who visit other women in their neighborhoods to get out the word. Progress has been slow, but the message is getting across, said program coordinator Jesse Wilson.

"It's a matter of repetition," Wilson said. "You keep telling them until they finally go and see the doctor. We have women we've talked to for two years until they say, 'All right, I'm

going, I'm tired of you bothering me.' We're persistent."

Thomas Tucker, an internationally known epidemiologist at the University of Kentucky's Markey Cancer Center, raised some questions after reading the University of Louisville report.

Tucker said he thinks differences in black-white breast cancer survival rates are more likely related to differences in income, education and access to care.

"Their article suggests it might be related to race, but there's a growing body of evidence that it also might be related to poverty," Tucker said.

On the other hand, Tucker said, he agrees with Gamel that the report points to the need for earlier diagnosis among black women.

LIFE ABUNDANTLY

Fight prostate cancer: "A call to arms for black men"

By Minister Abdul Alim Muhammad, M.D.

Special to Sentinel-Voice

On Oct. 16, 1995, the date of the historic Million Man March (MMM), the call was made for atonement, reconciliation and responsibility. Responsibility means taking charge, being accountable, being active and proactive.

One area that needs responsibility on the part of Black men is that of cancer. Black men in America have

the highest cancer rate of any ethnic group in the world. The cancer incidence rate for Black men in America between the years 1988 and 1992 was 560 per 100,000 population. For Black females, the rate was 326 per 100,000 (an incidence that is just 58 percent of the male rate). These figures, compiled by the American Cancer Society, showed that Native Americans have an incidence rate that is only 35 percent of the incidence rate of Black American males (all

other ethnic groups range in between). So much for the old wives' tale that Black people don't get cancer.

Actually it wasn't until 1969 that the first major Black cancer incidence study was done in the United States, revealing that the truth was quite different from the popular mythology. Even today, many Blacks are blissfully unaware of the increased cancer risk that they face. However, this should be of no surprise to anyone who is familiar with

the common risks associated with the development of cancer.

These risks include 1) poor diet (one full of meats and saturated fats and lacking in fresh fruits and vegetables, fiber and antioxidants); 2) smoking (which is the number one cause of lung cancers and cancers of the tongue, mouth, head and neck — just to name a few); 3) the immoderate consumption of alcohol, which can directly cause cancer or serve as a co-factor with other

risks and 4) environmental factors, (i.e., chemical pollutants often abound in Black communities, the literal dumping ground for toxic waste of every sort). Other risk factors may include stress, repressed emotions, obesity and certain common viral infections. When it is understood and appreciated that Blacks in general, and Black males in particular, have a higher exposure to these risk factors, then our higher incidence of cancer is quite

understandable.

Recently the American Cancer Society in conjunction with many other national organizations, including the Nation of Islam and the 100 Concerned Black Men, met in New Orleans to discuss the alarming rate of prostate cancer that is now occurring in Black men.

The essential facts of the matter are these: approximately 184,500 Americans will be diagnosed with prostate cancer (See Prostate, Page 9)

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