

Knowledge about special form of breast cancer vital

By Barbara Reynolds
Special to Sentinel-Voice
(NNPA) - What most women know about breast cancer is not enough to protect them from a growing silent killer.

The common wisdom dictates: Have regular mammograms; conduct self-examinations for lumps. While that information is good advice for most forms of breast cancer, it does little to detect a form called inflammatory breast cancer. IBC, a rare but lethal disease, is more common among African-American women than White women.

With IBC, only 40 percent of patients survive more than five years, according to scientific experts, such as Dr. Massimo Critofanilli, a director at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer center in Houston.

A major problem is that IBC is often misdiagnosed. While the medical establishment has been trained to look for lumps, IBC appears in sheets of cancer, or what doctors call cancer nests.

As part of October's Cancer Awareness Month, clinics and hospitals are sending mobile vehicles equipped with testing equipment called Mammovans into underserved neighborhoods. In limited, informal research

among those involved in this cancer prevention programs, none were found who had heard of IBC.

Some of the typical symptoms of IBC appear as swelling, sometimes a cup size in a few days; darkened color; ridges and thickened areas of the skin; a bruise that doesn't disappear; nipple retraction or discharge; breast warm to the touch, or aching or stabbing breast pain.

Personal statements on the IBC Research Foundation website attest to how off-base diagnoses can be. Doctors confused IBC symptoms with spider bites.

Patients were told that their discomfort came from wearing wire bras; that "the good news is that cancer doesn't hurt," and patients were wrongly informed that they were too young to have cancer.

Misdiagnoses can often prove tragic. Personal testimonies on the website tell heartbreaking stories about instances when some doctors, once they had finally performed biopsies and found the disease, discovered it was in Stage 4. There is no stage five.

Of particular concern are the news reports that give the impression that IBC is insignificant because it only represents 2-5 percent of breast

cancers in the United States. That may be true, but according to the IBC Foundation the rate among African-Americans who have this form of cancer is as high as 10 percent.

Ten percent, with such a low survival rate, is significant and much more should be done by cancer organizations to get the word out to the medical profession, as well as potential patients.

Far too often, threats or high risks to the health of African-Americans are buried in the fine print. For example, the rate of AIDS diagnoses for Black women is 23 times that of White women. And HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death for Black women aged 25-34 years of age, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

In fact, this reality is so prevalent that it provided political fodder for Sen. Hillary Clinton in a recent presidential debate at Howard University. She intimated that racism drove public policy in dealing with the HIV/AIDS plague. Clinton told the appreciative, mostly Black, audience that if young White women were dying at the rate young Blacks were from AIDS there would be a national outcry.

Far too often, when Black women are in peril, there is barely a national whimper.

Recall how in the early nineties several courts and at least legislators in 20 states arm-twisted poor women on welfare to use Norplant contraceptives. These thin rods were surgically implanted in women's arms to prevent conception.

Poor women, who feared losing their welfare checks, allowed the devices to be implanted, and there was little or no concern for the health risks that went with them.

A class-action suit reported that women suffered horrible scarring and permanent nerve damage. Doctors, out of fear of malpractice suits or ignorance refused to remove the rods.

Most of those harmed were Black women and although there was much press to promote Norplant, when complaints came of their harm, the press developed amnesia.

So now, there is IBC — inflammatory breast cancer — to concern us along with the perils of normal forms of cancer. The American Cancer Society estimated more

than 19,000 Black women would be diagnosed with breast cancer this year — the second most common cancer among Black women, surpassed only by lung cancer. And while the incidence of ordinary breast cancer is about 12 percent lower in Black women than in White women, with Black women, it often strikes at an earlier age, and the mortality rate is higher.

Early detection is still the best medicine. Regular mammograms and self-exams are still lifesavers in most situations. Something more, however, has to be done about IBC. The wall of ignorance and silence must come down.

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Your Horoscope Says... October 25-31

ARIES

Charm is an extremely effective tool for you this week. Charisma works better than at any recent time, especially at home. Shine brightly and let your glow work for you. Your self-image is your most effective tool.

Soul Affirmation: Romantic and financial rewards are calling me, and I listen.

Lucky Numbers: 17, 29, 54

TAURUS

The spiritual package you've been waiting for is likely to arrive this week. It should assure you that you've been on the right track. Your insights can be an inspiration to those who work with you. Love is the reward for generosity.

Soul Affirmation: I seek good news by reaching out to those who love me.

Lucky Numbers: 10, 23, 26

GEMINI

This week, your gentle spirit shines through. Your rough and tumble side is not appropriate for the relationships that you'll encounter. Someone will need your understanding and sympathy. Give it with sensitivity.

Soul Affirmation: My feelings are a reflection of the company I keep.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 9, 31

CANCER

Look for financial good news this week. Wow! It's about time. This week might be a good week to window shop for a big vacation or extravagant purchase. Be sensitive to your lover's needs this week. You may have been thinking too much of your own needs recently.

Soul Affirmation: Being easy to get along with is the best thing I can do this week.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 16, 40

LEO

Be especially sensitive to your spirit and your intuition this week. They are your sixth sense that will alarm you of a situation that you should avoid. You'll also be alerted to meet a new person who will be important to your personal life in the near future. Expect the unexpected from your lover.

Soul Affirmation: New intuitions create new plans and a new cast of characters.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 12, 14

VIRGO

Do not feel alone in facing your tumultuous circumstances this week. Call upon your support system, and do not be afraid to ask for help. Your ability to reach out will be a strong sign of courage. The people closest to you will feel a new respect for you.

Soul Affirmation: When I reach out in love, someone is always there.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 24, 32

LIBRA

Do not narrow your options by accepting any offer that is put on the table this week. Internalize the situation and discover how resourceful you are, then capitalize on your own strengths and ability to make things happen. Don't underestimate yourself, especially this week!

Soul Affirmation: The wisdom of the ages is revealed in my spirit.

Lucky Numbers: 35, 43, 48

SCORPIO

Love, joy and hope fill the air around you this week. Three of the greatest intangible assets that one can experience will be given to you in abundance this week. Use them to overcome the bad vibes coming from a co-worker this week.

Soul Affirmation: Hope is future's way of shining on me this week.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 22, 42

SAGITTARIUS

Live this week especially in a

celebratory mode and count your blessings for you are wealthy in ways that are above materialistic levels. Do not dwell on the financial situation in which you find yourself this week. Be ecstatic about the little pleasures that bring you laughter and gladness in your life.

Soul Affirmation: When I give thanks for what I have, I lose all sense of what is missing.

Lucky Numbers: 7, 28, 30

CAPRICORN

Take the time this week for self-reflection. There is something about yourself that you are not seeing clearly. Remember now and whenever you examine your inner-self to celebrate your strengths, for you have so many. And in accepting your weaknesses as necessary, you are rewarded.

Soul Affirmation: When I am clear about who I am, the world becomes clearer.

Lucky Numbers: 6, 11, 47

AQUARIUS

This week, your honest acceptance of yourself will give you a power of both grandeur and humility. People will approach you for advice. You are capable of seeing clearly what it is that troubles them. This week, be a counselor. By doing so, you will find your prize.

Soul Affirmation: I rejoice because of who I know myself to be.

Lucky Numbers: 34, 51, 52

PISCES

This week, others might mistake your gift for something else. They may not be able to see it, but your inner strength is very available to you this week. Fill the workplace with warmth as soon as you enter. Let peace radiate from your inner glow.

Soul Affirmation: Love is the greatest gift I can give.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 25, 33

HBCU

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play. Some are for work. Some are both," Moss said.

"A blog can help keep everyone in the loop, promote cohesiveness and group culture, and provide an informal voice of a project or department to outsiders."

Comedian Joe Torry is currently featured on the site as an alumnus from Lincoln University. Moss says that celebrity profiles are one way to let people know that HBCUs still have relevance.

"Our HBCUs have produced many notable graduates in the fields of education, science, entertainment, sports and many more," Moss said. "In an effort to raise the awareness of our HBCUs, we have begun to feature notable celebrities and prominent Black college alumni on our site."

Moss says that they continue to look towards the future as 90,000 high school students interested in Black colleges are now registered to the site. HBCUconnect.com gave \$5,000 to the United Negro College Fund this year, and plans to quadruple its donation and sponsor the event nationally next year. The company is also sponsoring a cruise this fall so that HBCU friends, alumni and current students can network and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Through their hard work, Moss says the family owned and operated business will continue to grow and provide more services to Black college supporters.

"We'd like to continue to raise the awareness of these schools and position ourselves in such a way that our community respects, values and realizes the relevance of these fine institutions," Moss said. "We are a site and community of individuals whose mission it is to shed light on the often-overshadowed truth of these important institutions' contributions to the tapestry that is America."

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