

INVESTIGATION OF MINORITIES' AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF BREAST SELF EXAMINATION

Research has been proven that African American women are less likely than White women to have mammograms, and even less likely to be aware of what mammograms are. Thus, these minority women, who most often live in urban areas, are more likely to die from breast cancer. Breast self examination is one technique that can lead to early detection of breast lesions.

Our study determined the knowledge and perception of breast self examinations among 40 adult women in an urban clinic. Each participant who agreed to participate in our study was given an information sheet, a five-step breast self exam handout, and a 23-item questionnaire. After questionnaires were completed, all answers were entered into a standard statistical software package. Data were analyzed using *t* test statistical and variables.

Our results showed that many of the women had little-to-no breast cancer awareness. Based on these results and previous clinical trials, we conclude that education is an effective means to inform patients of the significance of breast self examinations.

Student Researcher: Lauren Wilson, Academy of Business and Technology, Detroit, Michigan;

Mentor: Eric Ayers, MD, University Health Center, Detroit, Michigan

INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women and the second leading cause of cancer death. Moreover, breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among African Americans. The higher rates of cancer death among African American women are due to several factors. Often, minority women are not being educated about breast cancer and the steps they can take toward increasing their survival rate.

A key factor in increasing the survival rate of minority women is early detection. Breast self examination (BSE) can have a significant impact on the survival rate, since approximately 90% of breast cancers are discovered via self examination. Our study attempted to acquire a better understanding of the awareness and perceptions of breast self examination, so that educational initiatives can be developed for both patient and physician. We addressed this issue by administering questionnaires that focused on awareness and perceptions to determine barriers to knowing the significance of breast self examinations among a group of minority women.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We developed a questionnaire for adult women, oral consent forms, and information sheets. All were submitted and received approval from the institution review board at our school.

Forty adult women patients from an urban clinic were recruited for our study and asked to complete a 23-item questionnaire focusing on perceptions and awareness of breast self examination. All subjects were recruited primar-

ily by the research assistant. Once oral consent was obtained, the research assistant gave each participant an information sheet indicating the length and nature of the questionnaire, as well as the patient's rights as a participant. The questionnaire was then administered and, upon completion of survey, a five-step breast exam handout was given to the participant.

When all 40 questionnaires were completed during a three-week period, each one was given an identification number. All questionnaires were coded and entered into a database (SPSS, Chicago, Illinois). All data were analyzed using the *t* test statistics.

RESULTS

Of the 40 women who agreed to participate in the study, 37 were African American and three were Caucasian. Out of 40 women, 31 said they performed breast self examinations. The women who performed BSE did not have accurate knowledge of the purpose of the breast examination and what the exam was intended to find.

From a list of symptoms, the women were asked to identify symptoms of breast cancer; the women believed that only 51% were actual symptoms of breast cancer. When asked to select risk factors that contributed to the development of breast cancer, the women believed that 78% of the listed risk factors were not linked to breast cancer. Eighty-six percent of the women felt they were not at-risk to develop breast cancer. Alarmingly, two out of three women with a family history of breast cancer felt that they were not at risk to have breast cancer.

DISCUSSION

The outcomes of this study indicate that minority women may lack awareness of breast self examination and basic

knowledge of breast cancer. In this study, the majority of the participants wanted information on how to properly perform a breast self examination. Based on our results and previous clinical

trials, we know that minority women are receptive to being educated and receiving training. This research points to the need for increased breast cancer educational efforts in urban clinics.