General Information

Source: NBC News
Creator: Brian Williams/Dr. Nancy Snyderman
Event Date: 11/27/2007
Air/Publish Date: 11/27/2007

Resource Type: Video News Report
Copyright: NBCUniversal Media, LLC.
Copyright Date: 2007
Clip Length: 00:02:47

Description

Statistics show that African American women are less likely than white women to get breast cancer. But when they do, they’re younger, the cancer is more aggressive, and they are less likely to survive. Dr. Nancy Snyderman explains why.

Keywords

African American, Women, Screening, Breast Cancer, Research, Genetics, Ancestry, Mammogram, Doctors, Africa

Citation

MLA
African American Women and Breast Cancer

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:
Tonight, breast cancer, really in black and white. A new study out tonight is raising questions about the way doctors have been assessing risk factors for breast cancer in all American women. The concern tonight is that the model is broken, and that it's African American women who may be paying a very heavy price for that. Here is our chief medical editor, Dr. Nancy Snyderman.

Ms. VANESSA McCASKILL: It was devastating. Scary.

Dr. NANCY SNYDERMAN reporting:
In 2001, Vanessa McCaskill joined the ranks of millions of African American women diagnosed with breast cancer.

Ms. McCASKILL: I was only 36 years old. To hear the word "cancer," it was unreal.

SNYDERMAN: Statistics show that black women are less likely than whites to get breast cancer, but when they do, they're younger, the cancer's more aggressive and the women less likely to survive. For years, doctors have assessed a woman's breast cancer risk using a model developed in 1989. The problem is, that model was based on data gathered solely from white women.

Dr. FUNMI OLOPADE (University of Chicago Medical Center): So we're beginning to ask the question, is it really just all about access or is it possible that, because breast cancer affects women differently, that for some women it might be a completely different disease?

SNYDERMAN: Dr. Lisa Newman has conducted research on breast cancer patients in Ghana, working to learn why cancers are so different.

Dr. LISA NEWMAN (University of Michigan): African ancestry, in and of itself, might be associated with a genetic predisposition for developing very aggressive forms of breast cancer.

SNYDERMAN: Today's study in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute introduces a revised risk assessment model based on updated science. The goal? To encourage more black women to participate in clinical trials and offer them opportunities for earlier interventions they may have missed before. Early
detection was key for Vanessa, and she's thankful for every one of the last six cancer-free years.


Ms. McCASKILL: Awesome.

My hope for my daughters is that, in my lifetime that we find a cure for breast cancer. I don't ever want them to have to deal with what I've had to deal with.

SNYDERMAN: Early detection really matters. And if you're a black woman and you have a family history of early-onset breast cancer, you really need to consider getting breast cancer screening, a mammogram, earlier, and you have to talk to your doctor about getting that, perhaps before the age of 40. Talk to your doctor about your risk.

And, Brian, I cannot drive it home enough, clinical trials matter. This is not experimentation. It's how doctors and scientists gather information so we can make a difference.

WILLIAMS: It sounds like the only way to even up the playing field.

SNYDERMAN: Absolutely. We need people of all races and ages in these very important trials. And it's easy to find them at your local medical center.

WILLIAMS: Nancy, thank you, as always.

SNYDERMAN: You betcha.