Evaluating Disparities in Access to Quality Cancer Care for Black Women with Triple-Negative Breast Cancer in the US: A Provider Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) presents unique challenges due to its aggressive nature and limited treatment options. Black women are disproportionately affected by TNBC, experiencing higher incidence rates and poorer outcomes compared to other racial and ethnic groups. This study aims to evaluate disparities in access to quality cancer care for Black women with TNBC from the perspective of oncology health care providers. By focusing on providers' insights, the study seeks to advance equity in:

- Cancer prevention
- Treatment
- Survivorship

A 2021 publication from the Tigerlily Foundation found that **53% of TNBC cases are diagnosed in African American women under age 50, compared to 16% of White women.**

METHODS

Between December 2022 and February 2023, the Association of Community Cancer Centers (ACCC) conducted a survey of 84 multidisciplinary care team members who provided care to Black patients with TNBC. The online survey captured quantitative and qualitative data on challenges related to:

- Accessing timely TNBC diagnosis and treatment services
- Care coordination for work-up and biomarker testing
- Confidence in TNBC treatment
- Clinical trial enrollment
- Supportive care services
- Related referrals

Additionally, a follow-up focus group was conducted in May 2023 to further interpret select survey data, with a focus on the following with respect to individuals with TNBC:

- Shared decision-making
- Patient-provider communication
- Ways to support cancer programs and practices in improving screening, biomarker testing, and care coordination

RESULTS

Oncology care team members reported several barriers to accessing timely diagnosis and treatment services for Black women with TNBC:

1. Challenges in coordinating care for work-up and biomarker testing
2. Providers' confidence in providing guideline-concordant comprehensive cancer care services for this patient population
3. Enrolling patients in clinical trials
4. Making referrals for supportive care services

Patient-Level Factors that Providers Believe Impact TNBC Diagnosis and Treatment Access

- 21% insurance-related factors
- 18% health literacy
- 14% geographic distance to care facilities

Practice-Level Barriers Reported by Providers

- 34% insurance-related factors
- 27% capacity to accommodate new patients
- 19% limited accessibility of practice's location

The survey indicated that **health literacy, patient inquiry about clinical trials, and likelihood of participation/adherence** were significant factors in **referring patients to clinical trials.**

*Note: Limitations of potential sample selection bias and limited generalizability to all health care providers.

Community cancer programs treated an average of

21-50 patients with TNBC annually

31% of them being Black or African American

Self-Reported Comprehensive Cancer Care Services

Most Commonly Offered

- 82% Palliative Care
- 77% Nutrition Support
- 68% Telemedicine
- 68% Psychological Counseling
- 68% Financial Advocacy

Less Commonly Offered

- 21% Recreational Therapy
- 17% Legal Aid
- 16% Childcare

Areas of Care for TNBC Patients – % Self-Reported as "Very Confident"

- 59% Breast Reconstruction
- 54% Tobacco Cessation
- 52% Fertility Counseling
- 52% Coordinating care across a fragmented health care system

CONCLUSIONS

To reduce disparities and improve outcomes for Black women with TNBC, targeted interventions should focus on:

- Enhancing provider education particularly with respect to treatment options and clinical trial enrollment
- Improving care coordination systems
- Promoting cultural sensitivity

Efforts should also be made to overcome barriers related to:

- Geographic distance
- Limited accessibility of practice location
- Insurance-related factors

Resources from the ACCC program, Eliminating Disparities in Access to Quality Cancer Care in African American Women with Triple Negative Breast Cancer, can be accessed through the Quick Response (QR) Code. accc-cancer.org/TNBC

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