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African American Women Need Earlier Screening for Breast Cancer

By Drahcir Semaj

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by: **Drahcir Semaj**

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of death for women, ages 40–55, and African American women under the age of 45 are more likely to develop breast cancer than any other group of women in the US.

Every three minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer; every 12 minutes a woman dies from breast cancer and every year over 5000 African American women die from the disease.

Although the cause of breast cancer is still unclear, researchers have determined that African American women tend to develop breast cancer at earlier ages than white women and they typically develop more aggressive types of tumors.

Breast cancer often occurs in African American women under the age of 40 and as early as age 25.

In a study of breast cancer tumors in African American and white women, conducted by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in 2004, researchers determined that breast tumors in young African American women were more likely to be fast-growing and more aggressive than those found in white women.

"One of the important conclusions from this study is that even when you correct for stage — that is, look at tumors of the same stage from white women and African American women — tumors from the African-American women tend to have features characteristic of more aggressive and rapidly growing cancers," said Dr. Peggy Porter, lead author of the study. "If their tumors tend to grow more quickly, this may help to explain why their cancers are being diagnosed at later stages, which can lead to poorer outcomes."

Other studies have indicated that there are other possible reasons that African American women suffer high death rates from breast cancer: unemployment or underemployment, lack of health insurance,

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and lack of proper health education have all been cited as possible socioeconomic contributing factors.

Overall, over 16 million women nationwide lack health insurance coverage and African American women are twice as likely to be uninsured as white women; over 30 percent of African American women live in poverty, and African American women are less likely to get mammograms.

Regardless of the socioeconomic factors that may contribute to the high death rate for African American women, medical professionals agree that early detection is paramount to surviving breast cancer and they've issued a number of recommendations to help African American women detect the disease in its earliest stages and improve their chances of survival.

Medical professionals recommend that African American women should: Practice monthly breast self-examinations (BSE) starting at age 20. Have a clinical breast examination, done by their

physician, at least once a year. Have at least one mammogram completed, between the ages of 30 and 35. Have a mammogram completed every one to two years until age of 50. After 50, African American women should have an annual mammogram.

Breast cancer is a common disease among women of all races in America. This year, more than 200,000 women will develop the disease and 40,000 of them will die from it. Though African American women have less incidence of developing the disease, once diagnosed, their chances of survival are less than their white sisters.

To increase their chances of surviving breast cancer, African American women need understand the risk that breast cancer poses to them and get screened for the disease earlier and more often.

For more information about breast cancer and your risk, please contact your physician or visit:

National Breast Cancer Foundation:

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Breast Cancer Education Gets Visual

By News Canada

(NC)—If a picture is worth a thousand words, how do you use pictures to help people understand and learn about a sensitive subject like breast cancer? Researchers from the division of biomedical communications in the department of surgery at the University of Toronto are exploring the use of images to study how best to teach women at risk about breast cancer.

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Text and images are used on the Breast Matters site (www.bmc.med.utoronto.ca/breastmatters) to explain and portray the complex information about breast cancer and breast health for Canadian women. The site is informational, free of jargon and includes definitions and visual explanations of complex concepts. The site includes an overview of breast anatomy, a section on early detection of breast cancer, self-examination, annual check-ups, mammography, ultrasound and x-ray and biopsy. Also included is information about breast cancer risk factors, risk reduction and links and resources for more information.

"Our team uses medical illustration to bridge art, science, medicine and communication," said Professor Linda Wilson-Pauwels, co-lead investigator of the study. "Design and communication theory combined with scientific knowledge informs the production of visual material for health promotion and medical education – in this case about breast cancer."

An initiative of the Bell University Laboratories, a collaborative research program funded by Bell Canada that contributes to innovation and leadership in the development of communications technology in Canada, the researchers used a focus group of 10 women from the breast cancer screening program at Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto to determine what breast cancer information to feature and what sorts of visuals to use. Photography, video, animation and illustration are used with varying levels of complexity and interactivity to provide a visually stunning learning experience.

A second part of the site will be developed in 2003 for women coping with breast cancer. Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in Canadian women. It accounts for almost 1 in 3 cancer diagnoses among Canadian women. On average, 104 Canadian women die of breast cancer every week, according to Canadian Cancer Society estimates.

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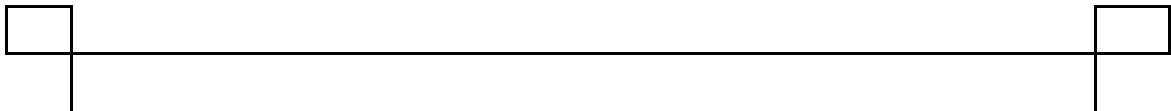
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