40% of Black Patients With Metastatic Breast Cancer Are Not Told About Clinical Trials

Yet 83% of Black people with metastatic breast cancer expressed interest in participating in trials.

June 8, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

Many Black people with metastatic breast cancer are not being offered opportunities to participate in clinical trials despite their expressed interest, according to research presented at the 2022 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting held in Chicago. What's more, Black respondents were less likely than non-Black respondents to trust the trials and to believe people of all races and ethnicities would be treated fairly in such trials.

The survey of 424 patients with metastatic breast cancer was conducted through a collaboration between ASCO and the Association of Community Cancer Centers and included patients in the BECOME (Black Experience of Clinical Trial and Opportunities for Meaningful Engagement) initiative. A total of 102 patients who responded identified as Black.

The survey found that 83% of Black respondents were somewhat or very likely to consider participating in a clinical trial. However, 40% of Black respondents reported not being informed by their care team about the possibility of enrolling in such a trial. This compares with 33% of non-Black survey respondents.

Clinical trial populations must reflect the diversity of the general population that will use the drugs and procedures being tested. Historically, Black participation in clinical trials has been low compared with the rest of the population. Not only does this mean there are less data about how drugs perform in African Americans, but it also limits Black patients' access to experimental treatments.

The survey was conducted to better understand why Black patients with metastatic breast cancer—that is, cancer that has spread to another part of the body—are less likely to enroll in clinical trials than non-Black patients.

Black people with breast cancer have the highest death rate and shortest survival among racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Researchers hope to boost awareness of clinical trials by

informing patients, increasing education and training health care providers to offer unbiased, patient-friendly information about trials.

The researchers also noted that 73% of Black respondents expressed concerns about side effects. More than half were also worried about the effectiveness of treatments and whether experimental drugs could be harmful.

“This study was initiated in 2019 and led by a very special and ardent advocate of inclusivity in breast cancer trial enrollment. Sadly, she passed away from metastatic breast cancer, but we all strive to continue her efforts by bringing the patient voice and authenticity of advocacy to our work so that we can demonstrate the impact that patients can have on the clinical trials process,” lead author Stephanie Walker, RN said in a news release.

“These study findings reinforce the important role that health care teams have in boosting participation in clinical trials, particularly for Black patients living with metastatic breast cancer,” added ASCO chief medical officer and executive vice president Julie R. Gralow, MD, FACP, FASCO.

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