Why Black Women May Die Of Breast Cancer At a Higher Rate

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Researchers have worked for years to figure out exactly why African-American women are more likely to die of breast cancer than white women. Now the latest findings, originally published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, show that, in most cases, black women are in worse health overall when they are diagnosed than whites, leading to poorer outcomes overall, NBC reported.

For the study, scientists compared the data of 7,375 black women, 65 and older, on Medicare and diagnosed with breast cancer to three different groups of 7,375 white patients. After comparing black patients with white patients of the same age, year of diagnosis and who lived in similar locations, findings showed the white patients lived three years more than their African-American counterparts. When scientists compared black women and white women cancer patients who were the same age, diagnosed in the same year with similar illnesses and tumors, they found that disparities to just one year between the races. Finally, when researchers compared white and black patients of the same age and socio-economic status, who lived in similar locations and had the same type of cancer and treatment, the disparity fell to just three months.

According to Jeffrey Silber, MD, a researcher at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and leader of the study, the findings show that by the time black women come in to see a doctor they're sicker because they don't get the preventive care they need. "They are not coming in early enough," Silber said.

Experts believe the solution to decreasing the death rates of black women cancer patients lies in early detection. Some think that black women with cancer wait too long to see a doctor because they fear being diagnosed with the disease and feel they're doomed to die anyway. But actively seeking care and being vocal about the quality of care you receive can be the difference between life and death for cancer patients.

There's a new exam that tests for genes that might predict breast cancer in women. For more information, click here.

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