Three Big Factors Influence Cancer Diagnosis and Survival

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Lower rates of survival among patients struggling with uterine, colon and breast cancer were associated with three factors: lacking private health insurance, being poor or being African American, according to three studies presented at the American Association for Cancer Research and reported by HealthDay News.

In individual studies done by three different institutions, researchers found that lack of private insurance, poverty levels and race affected cancer mortality rates, incidence and timeliness of diagnosis.

For the first study, scientists from the University of California analyzed insurance and health records of 178,891 patients from the National Cancer Database. Researchers found that privately insured women had a four-year survival rate of 89 percent compared with 81 percent for the uninsured and 76 percent for those on Medicaid. In addition, young women with Medicare insurance boasted a four-year survival rate of 79 percent compared with 69 percent for older women with the same insurance.

Findings of this first study also showed that black women with uterine cancer had a 63 percent survival rate, compared with 82 percent for white and Latino women survivors.

“Uninsured and Medicaid and Medicare patients with uterine cancer are more likely to die within four years than privately insured patients,” said Stacey A. Fedewa, MPH, lead author of the study.

For the second report, researchers at the University of Massachusetts analyzed almost 7,000 cases of colorectal cancer. Scientists found that late-stage diagnosis was more common among people in poor communities. Residents of the poorest areas had a 13 percent greater incidence of colorectal cancer and 15 percent higher incidence of advanced colorectal cancer than those living in richer areas.

For the third study, scientists at George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services reviewed the records of almost 1,000 women tested for breast cancer. Researchers found that white women with private insurance waited an average of almost 16 days between testing and diagnosis, that black women waited 27 days and Latina women waited 51 days.

When women had Medicare or Medicaid, the wait between testing and diagnosis increased to almost 40 days for African-American women and nearly 71 days for Latina women (but it lessened to 12 days for white women). For women without insurance, the wait was almost 60 days for African-American women, almost 67 days for Latina women and 45 days for white women.

Doctors agreed that while barriers to care such as cultural differences, health literacy, education and institutional racism do exist, having health insurance is key to getting cancer screening and treatment.

To read more about bridging the gap between screening and testing for women battling breast cancer, click here.

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