

# Lessons Learned in Developing a Support Intervention for African American Women With Breast Cancer

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To describe the process of planning a theory-based support group project for African American women with breast cancer.

**Data Sources:** A needs assessment and recruitment strategies consistent with the Oncology Nursing Society's *Multicultural Outcomes: Guidelines for Cultural Competence* were used to adapt a support group intervention for newly diagnosed African American women in urban central Texas.

**Data Synthesis:** The reviewed literature and local cancer survivor leaders indicated the need for education and support of newly diagnosed women. Although researchers worked for several years with lay leaders to gain legitimacy and trust, not enough participants were recruited to test an intervention specifically for African American women.

**Conclusions:** Recruiting support group research participants from a relatively small minority population is problematic even when collaborating with population leaders.

**Implications for Nursing:** Nurses may encounter barriers to conducting research in minority populations. Starting early to build credibility with that population, being flexible with eligibility criteria, beginning with pre-experimental studies, and paying participants may be required.

The Oncology Nursing Society's (ONS's, 1999) *Multicultural Outcomes: Guidelines for Cultural Competence*, developed to address nursing practice, education, and research, targets many aspects of diversity, including ethnic minority and socioeconomic status. These guidelines directed a project to develop, implement, and test a theory-based support group intervention for African American women newly diagnosed with breast cancer. This article discusses the reasons for the proposal of this component of a larger project, the actions taken during the development phase, and the lessons learned along the way.

The African American Breast Cancer Support Group Project was the secondary aim of a five-year Self-Transcendence in Breast Cancer Support Groups Project. The primary aim of the study was to test the impact of theoretically based activities during an eight-week support group intervention for women of any ethnic background recently diagnosed with breast cancer. The facilitation of self-transcendence views and behaviors in weekly, 90-minute, closed support group sessions was expected to positively affect self-transcendence and physical and emotional well-being outcomes by the end of the intervention and six months later. Intervention session activities included problem solving, values clarification, and training in relaxation techniques, constructive thinking, assertive communication skills, and emotional management. In total, 161 women were assigned by order of recruitment

## Key Points . . .

- ▶ Evidence exists of differential treatment and decreased survival in African American women with breast cancer.
- ▶ Breast cancer advocacy in the African American community includes empowering survivors to advocate for themselves and other women.
- ▶ Although traditional cancer support groups are resources for education and support that may lead to empowerment, few minority patients participate in such support groups.
- ▶ Nontraditional interventions may be needed to empower African American women with a stronger sense of self-agency to effectively advocate for treatment information and appropriate care.

to intervention or community cancer support groups of 8–10 women each.

The secondary aim of the Self-Transcendence in Breast Cancer Support Groups Project was planned with support from local African American breast cancer activists. Race and ethnicity data from two earlier pilot support group studies (Coward, 1998, 2003) revealed that African American women were underrepresented in that research. Although increased efforts in minority recruitment and retention resulted in higher minority representation in the Coward (2003) study, a different approach was chosen for the current study to reach newly diagnosed African American women.

## Literature Review

### Education and Support Needs of African American Women With Newly Diagnosed Breast Cancer

The cultural competency guidelines outlined by ONS (1999) directed the researchers to base their work on previous research findings and current healthcare problems in the target

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