



Black Women and Breast Cancer

For black women the news is good and bad. Good because black women are significantly less likely (one-third less likely) to develop breast cancer than white women. The bad news is that a higher percentage of black women die from breast cancer than white women. Studies in the US have shown that black women are 30% more likely to die from breast cancer and in the UK it has been shown that black women are two times more likely to die from breast cancer. In addition to this, numerous studies have shown that when black women do get cancer they tend to get it at a much younger age than white women with a recent study in the UK showing that black women are diagnosed with breast cancer 20 years younger than white women, (an average of 46 years old compared to an average of 67 years old for white women).

The key question has been why there is this difference between black and white women and the answer has been confirmed in the past few years. It has been found that black women tend to get a different type of breast cancer called **Triple Negative Breast Cancer**. This type of breast cancer is found to be three times more common in black women than white women. In addition, studies in the US have found that 20-40% of black women diagnosed with breast cancer have triple negative breast cancer. Whilst studies in Ghana have shown that as many as 60% of women diagnosed with breast cancer have triple negative breast cancer. In Nigeria and Senegal the same trend is seen with 55% of cases being triple negative. A first study in the UK has shown that 22% of black women diagnosed with breast cancer at an East London hospital had triple negative breast cancer.

Triple Negative Cancer is a newly identified type of breast cancer and because of this it is not yet fully understood and there are no specific treatments for it. The current treatments that have been used to successfully treat some of the other types of breast cancer are ineffective in treating triple negative breast cancer. The best treatment option for triple negative breast cancer is surgical removal followed by a combination of chemotherapy drugs but there isn't yet any formal recommendation of a chemotherapy combination to use for triple negative breast cancer. Much needed work is being conducted to try and understand triple negative breast cancer - why it develops, risk factors and treatment options- with the aim of improving the high mortality rate associated with this form of breast cancer.