

# Breast cancer screening being reconsidered

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October 21, 2009 (CHICAGO) (WLS) -- The American Cancer Society is preparing to alter its message on screening for breast and prostate cancer.

It is responding to a study in today's Journal of the American Medical Association that says increased screening doesn't reduce mortality from these diseases nearly as much as first thought.

The developments come as Chicago attempts to address the startling disparity in breast cancer disease between black and white women.

Advocates for better breast cancer treatment in the African-American community gathered Wednesday to hear about how most of Chicago's large health institutions are working together to improve access, quality and treatment

"The work we do is for you, for our mothers our daughters, sisters, aunts and really you are a testimony to what survival means," said Dr. David Ansell, Chief Medical Officer for Rush University Medical Center.

As Ansell and others talked about how African-American women are far more likely to get breast cancer, word came of the American Cancer Society's change of heart.

Its chief medical officer told the New York Times, "we don't want people to panic... but I'm admitting that American medicine has overpromised when it comes to screening. The advantages to screening have been exaggerated."

The society acknowledges that screening improvements in the last 20 years have increased detection of tumors. However, it turns out some wouldn't do harm over a lifetime. In fact, the study showed while there was 40% increase in cancer detection in recent years, that's led to a 10% decrease in mortality. Researchers would expect more.

Nevertheless, Ansell says that doesn't mean screening is useless.

"We may not have enough information at this point in time to tell which cancer is going to be the one that might kill you and the one that won't, but I think we are still obligated to screen and offer people treatment. And again, let's not over promise, but let's not throw the baby out with the bath water," Ansell said.

Survivors told of tales of lost insurance and benevolent efforts such as the Illinois Breast and Colon Cancer Program, funded by the state that reaches just 10 percent of patients.

"Whatever I can do in the future, I will be sounding out about the IBCC program, because they have helped me and they are continuing to help me," Sandra Jamison said.

At last report, African American women in this city are 116 percent more likely to die from breast cancer than white woman. That number has only increased as mortality in the white population from the disease has decreased dramatically in the last 20 years.

For medical researchers, such a disparity is unprecedented, and it is worse here than In L.A. Or New York.

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