

Communication Between Black Patients With Cancer and Their Oncology Clinicians: Exploring Factors That Influence Outcome Disparities

Elizabeth Guimond, BSN, RN, Berhan Getachew, BA, Timiya S. Nolan, PhD, APRN-CNP, ANP-BC,
Karen Miles Sheffield-Abdullah, PhD, RN, CNM, Jamie L. Conklin, MSLIS, and Rachel Hirschey, PhD, RN

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION: Significant cancer disparities exist between Black and White patients. One important contributor to patient outcomes disparities is patient-clinician communication. Conversations between clinicians and Black patients are often shorter and less detailed compared to White patients.

LITERATURE SEARCH: A systematic literature search was conducted. Databases were searched to identify studies that included (a) participants with a cancer diagnosis, (b) information specific to Black or African American participants, and (c) information on patient-clinician communication. A total of 67 articles underwent full review; 24 studies met inclusion criteria.

DATA EVALUATION: Each included study was scored for level of evidence, and common themes were identified across studies using the Matrix Method.

SYNTHESIS: The following themes were identified: relationship building, building trust, empowering patients for shared decision-making, addressing topics of patient concern, and consideration of community and family.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH: Results identify several ways that nurses can improve communication with Black patients. Research aimed at identifying interpersonal strategies to mitigate cancer disparities is needed.

KEYWORDS cancer; oncology; African American; Black; patient education; health communication

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Significant disparities in cancer prevention, detection, treatments, outcomes, and quality of life exist between Black and White patients. Black patients have higher death rates than all other racial and ethnic groups for most cancer types (Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results Program, 2021). When compared to White men, Black men have a higher incidence of prostate cancer and are twice as likely to die from the disease (National Cancer Institute [NCI], 2022). Compared to White women, Black women experience higher cervical cancer incidence and mortality, as well as a higher incidence of triple-negative breast cancer, which is more aggressive than other types of breast cancer (NCI, 2021). In addition, despite similar overall breast cancer incidence among White and Black women, Black women are more likely to die from the disease (NCI, 2022). Increasingly, researchers are attempting to improve these disparate health outcomes between Black and White populations, often identifying the healthcare system as a starting point for improvement.

Nurses have frequent communication and opportunities to build relationships with patients that can improve patient outcomes. Health communication is central to the nursing practice and is essential to providing person-centered care that results in positive patient outcomes (Kourkouta & Papathanasiou, 2014). The National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (2022) framework recognizes the healthcare system as having an influence on health outcomes (see Table 1). Within the healthcare system, nurses are situated at the interpersonal level of influence to affect patient health outcomes.