Fears of Recurrence Among Breast Cancer Survivors From Different Racial/Ethnic Groups

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Fear of recurrence is common among cancer patients and can cause stress and anxiety.

Many women make behavioral changes to try to reduce their risk of recurrence of breast cancer.

However, it is not known if there are ethnic differences in how women change their behavior.
Purpose

- To examine racial/ethnic differences in fears of recurrence

- To examine racial/ethnic differences in behavior changes made to reduce the risk of recurrence
Study Design

- Women who had completed treatment (except for hormonal therapy) were recruited from the San Francisco Bay Area.

- In-depth qualitative interview on reaction to diagnosis, social support, and their fears of recurrence.

- Women were completed questionnaires measuring social support, coping, mood, spirituality, and quality of life.

- Women repeated the questionnaires every six months for two years.
Participants

- 176 women with Stage 0, I, or II breast cancer who had recently finished treatment.

- Number of women in each group:
  - African-American: 45
  - Asian: 52
  - Caucasian: 54
  - Latina: 25
Participants

- The participants came from:
  - US
  - Canada
  - Latin America/Caribbean
  - Asia/Pacific Island
  - Europe
Participants

- Age ranged from 31-83, with a mean of 57 (no differences between groups)
- Time since diagnosis ranged from 5-43 months with a mean of 24 months
Demographics

- **Education:**
  - Less than High School: 4 (2%)
  - High School Graduate: 11 (6%)
  - Some College: 44 (25%)
  - College Graduate: 52 (30%)
  - Post Graduate: 48 (27%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total (n=176)</th>
<th>African American (n=45)</th>
<th>Asian (n=52)</th>
<th>Caucasian (n=54)</th>
<th>Latina (n=25)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>O/DCIS</td>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>82(46)</td>
<td>27(60)</td>
<td>23(44)</td>
<td>23(48)</td>
<td>9(36)</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>84(48)</td>
<td>18(40)</td>
<td>24(46)</td>
<td>26(43)</td>
<td>16(64)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Therapy</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemo</td>
<td>95(54)</td>
<td>23(51)</td>
<td>28(54)</td>
<td>28(54)</td>
<td>16(64)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surgery</td>
<td>172(98)</td>
<td>45(100)</td>
<td>49(94)</td>
<td>53(91)</td>
<td>25(100)</td>
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<td>Radiation</td>
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<td>35(78)</td>
<td>34(65)</td>
<td>38(73)</td>
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<td>21(49)</td>
<td>30(29)</td>
<td>49(81)</td>
<td>17(68)</td>
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<td>Fam History</td>
<td>109(62)</td>
<td>30(73)</td>
<td>29(59)</td>
<td>35(88)</td>
<td>15(75)</td>
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</table>
Fears of Recurrence

- And because my cancer was not detected by mammogram, that creates even more of a fear for me, always. You know, because it’s never, it doesn’t really matter if the doctors and plus I have a lumpy breast so that doesn’t help either. So I never have that peace of mind. I still have this constant worry, that it might return, that’s always gonna be there. I never really have total peace of mind. I don’t think I ever will.

57 year old Chinese American with Stage I disease
Fears of Recurrence

- It is scary I think about it all the time. I could not have too many breast exams. I mean I just don’t know how I’ll never not worry about it. And that is scary. I feel like I really lucked out this time. And I can’t believe that I had breast cancer and said that I lucked out, but it’s a good scenario and its scary to think about the future. I mean one of my biggest fears about recurrence is just, of course if it’s on the same side they can’t do radiation twice.

50 year old Caucasian with Stage I disease
Trying Not to Worry

- I was like, “OK you know try having cancer and then you – you put it in a little box and put it behind you and not ever talk about it again or not ever think about it again,” you know. It’s not that easy. I think I do pretty darn good because I don’t think about it most of the time. But you do think about it once in awhile. You do worry about getting it again.

34 year old African/Caribbean with Stage I disease
The primary thing that was important to me was to believe that I had done everything – and it’s still important to me – to believe I’m doing everything I can to make sure that I don’t have a recurrence. And so if in the case I have a recurrence, I can say, I can be at peace with myself and say I did everything I could physically do that I could physically think of, mentally think of to keep this away. I am not going to freak out about recurrence until I have it….. It doesn’t serve me to worry about it, it doesn’t serve me to believe I’m going to get it again, it doesn’t serve me to believe I’m not going to get it again either because if I believe that than I would do the exercise and the health stuff that I do.

47 year old Caucasian with Stage I disease
Trying Not to Worry

- I did all I could do to make myself healthy and I can’t be worrying about is it gonna come back or am I gonna die in two months or am I going to die in two years. I think you gotta just say I did all I could do and whatever comes is gonna come and just move forward from there. Because otherwise it cripples your life.

48 year old Japanese American with Stage II disease
Acceptance

- By accepting it and then- then, that’s it! Go and live your life! Don’t dwell on things that already happened, so move forward.

47 year old Vietnamese American with Stage I disease
## Behavioral Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>Latina</th>
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<tr>
<td>Diet</td>
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<td>15(33)</td>
<td>24(46)</td>
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<td>Exercise</td>
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<td>3(6)</td>
<td>10(22)</td>
<td>8(15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid Chemicals</td>
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<td>2(4)</td>
<td>3(6)</td>
<td>1(2)</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>16(9)</td>
<td>5(11)</td>
<td>7(16)</td>
<td>3(5)</td>
<td>1(4)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Behavioral Changes

- I did all I could do to make myself healthy and I can’t be worrying about is it gonna come back .......... I think you gotta just say I did all I could do and whatever comes is gonna come and just move forward from there. Because otherwise it cripples your life.

48 year old Japanese American with Stage II disease
Motivation to Make Change

- I think I’ve evolved from the “I can do 10 things that will minimize my chance of getting cancer again to Well, I’m not going to be able to prevent the cancer from metastasizing if it’s going to metastasize”...So all I can do is sort of live life in or do stuff that increases my health overall......So just look sort of over at the big picture and say, “I’ll do the best that I can to keep myself healthy in all respects....”

39 year old Asian with Stage II disease
Diet

- I eat more vegetables than meat and I juice everyday. So I never had that before....So you know, I changed my diet completely. That’s the biggest change in my life.

37 year old Asian American with Stage II disease
Diet

- Definitely nutrition. If I’m cooking I try to buy organic...So I think that’s the best thing I can do. And uh, that’s the biggest change that I’ve made...I think I take more time to smell the roses. And I’m not as stressed out as I used to be about everything. I was always running around going crazy, and I think I’m able to let things go.

50 year old Caucasian with Stage I disease
Exercise

- I try to live a balanced life and I’ve gone back to exercising more and I started playing soccer again and I take my dogs for walks and I work in the garden and I don’t eat fast food. But you know if I get a chocolate craving, I’m going to have my chocolate. I know sugar is bad for cancer and I don’t care.

33 year old Caucasian with Stage II disease
Multiple Changes

- I have increased my exercise. I’m trying to get regular exercise. I try to eat healthier..... I’m trying to have soy and soy milk..... I’m more likely to have osteoporosis, so I want to counteract those things. So it’s not really so much for the breast cancer as much as it is just total overall health.... heart health, bone strength, all those things.

39 year old Korean American with Stage II disease
Screening

- I am diligent about appointments and things to do with health. Screenings and whether it’s cancer or – or – or cholesterol or what have you. Whereas before if I didn’t have time, I wouldn’t bother necessarily – I mean I’d get around to it when it became important…….. I am sticking to my um promise to myself um to be as loving and – loving – and good to myself as I can, meaning not all work but a balance – trying to balance some things in my life. ... Now I may not always live up to my own goals, but they’re still my goals and I will – you know and I will get there. I’m a goal setter.

60 year old African American with Stage II disease
I still see...my acupuncturist and I have seen her specifically to...tell me if my energy is getting better. She has insisted that I eat chicken because the type of energy and balance that I have is a water imbalance...

49 year old Caucasian with Stage II

Other behaviors: Meditation, Yoga, Herbs, Tai Chi, Chi Gong
Avoiding Chemicals

- Plastics, aluminum, second-hand smoke

- Smoking didn’t cause my cancer there was too much estrogen in the system, but it still was a prelude to the cancer or anything so I stopped smoking. I have adjusted my lifestyle too I don’t smoke, I don’t drink.

54 year old African American with Stage II disease
Avoiding Chemicals

- I use lots of plastic package – and lately I read about the plastic reaction and also microwave oven and so forth, so ... these I thought ... maybe ... if my family had the gene that easily, you know that in there will be the cause.

68 year old Asian American with Stage II disease
Nothing

- Fatalism: No, I think that if it is there and it’s going to grow, it’s going to grow.

67 year old Asian American with Stage I disease
Already engaging in healthy behavior:

No and everything’s pretty much the same. I don’t know what I can do. I think it just comes because I eat right. I don’t drink. I don’t smoke. I exercise daily, but I was doing that already and I got it. I don’t know what I can do to not get it. I just don’t know. If I did...if I found out there was something to do, I would definitely do it.

75 year old African American with Stage I disease
Conclusions

- Even though the women had completed therapy two years ago, fear of recurrence was still evident.
Conclusions

- While 73% of the women made some kind of change 50% or less of the women in each racial/ethnic group did.
- The majority of changes were diet and exercise.
Conclusions

- Fewer people than expected mentioned CAM.
- Some people mentioned avoiding chemicals.
- Stress reduction.
- A small percentage made no changes.
Conclusions

- Few racial/ethnic differences
  - However, fewer Latinas mentioned making changes, mostly dietary.
  - More Asian Americans mentioned exercise changes and stress reduction.
Implications

- Physicians need to realize how common fear of recurrence is among breast cancer survivors.
- Education and Information to breast cancer survivors on ways they can improve their health is an important aspect of healing and moving forward.
Implications

- Diet and exercise interventions may give women a place and support to make changes.
- Latinas might benefit from more education and support to make changes.
Thank you