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## Fear as a Barrier in Mammography Screenings

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## SUMMER RESEARCH AND CREATIVITY GRANTS

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Faculty Mentor: Dr. Jennifer Hatcher

Breast cancer is the most common cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death among African American women, exceeded only by lung cancer (American Cancer Society, Inc. 2006). Due to increased use of screening mammography and improvements in breast cancer treatments, breast cancer mortality rates have been steadily declining. However, African American women have not benefited at the same rates as women of other ethnicity. The five-year survival rate for African American women diagnosed with invasive breast cancer is only 77% compared to 90% among Caucasian women (American Cancer Society, 2007).

African American women are more likely to be diagnosed with a later stage of cancer and more likely to experience mortality because of breast cancer. There are many barriers to the use of mammography in African American women, such as accessibility, cost, lack of transportation, competing demands, lack of knowledge and increased fear and risk of breast cancer. During the past three years, my faculty mentor, Dr. Jennifer Hatcher, conducted a qualitative study examining the specific barriers to mammography for African American women visiting the Emergency Department (ED) for non-urgent care. Women visiting the ED for non-urgent care are more likely to be uninsured, not have a primary care provider and may be less likely to have had a mammogram. Dr. Hatcher identified fear as a barrier for most of the women in the study. The objective of this project was to explore the concept of fear among African American women as it relates to mammography. By exploring this concept, we could give healthcare providers a better insight to what specific factors prevent African American women from utilizing mammograms.

During this project, 39 interviews of African American women were conducted with the inclusion criteria of: (1) aged 40 or over; (2) not had a mammogram in more than one year, (3) being treated for a non-urgent complaint as determined by the ED triage nurse; (4) able to speak, read, and understand English; and (5) a self-identified African American woman. Interviews were reread and transcribed using a qualitative data analysis program called NVivo. The themes and factors relating to fear the women experienced were identified and analyzed.

The results concluded that over 40% of the fears identified pertained to anxiety associated with finding out the results or discovering the outcome of the mammography and over 30% related to the fear of pain that may come with receiving a mammogram. Less overwhelming results have been found in patients being afraid of getting retested for more serious issues, financial matters, exposure of the body, radiation, and lack of knowledge.

In conclusion, more research needs to be done to further explore how to better prepare African American women for the mammography process and how to better facilitate pain management.