

Comparing Virulent Breast Cancer Types in Sub-Saharan African Women and Women of African Descent

Thomasina Watts

Africana Studies, IU School of Liberal Arts

African American women who are diagnosed with breast cancer have a 41% higher mortality rate than Caucasian women, despite having lower incidence rates. Studies have also shown that African American women tend to have more aggressive tumors than Caucasian women. [American Cancer Society, 2013] While many believe that this disparity is due to poor diet and lifestyles, several studies have indicated that there may be a genetic tendency for these women to have aggressive type tumors, particularly triple negative tumors. This research project explores the genetic predispositions behind higher rates of more virulent forms of breast cancer in women of African descent. It has been hypothesized that the tendency for these women to have these aggressive cancers could be related to their African ancestry. Conclusive evidence of a genetic link between these occurrences could affect the way that all women of the African diaspora are screened and treated for breast cancer. Research has so far included reviews of current literature and interviews with professionals in the field of oncology. Future epidemiologic studies will compare tumor characteristics in women throughout the African diaspora, especially focusing on Afro- Caribbean and African American women. The research would be essential in shedding light on this serious disparity and could lead to higher survival rates for these women.

Mentor: Ronda Henry, Department of English, IU School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI