Talking to Your Audience About Breast Cancer Clinical Trials

Breast Cancer Clinical Trials

The information below provides an overview of breast cancer clinical trials.

• Clinical trials are carefully controlled research studies.
• People volunteer to take part in them.
• They look at new ways to prevent, screen, diagnose or treat a disease.
• Clinical trials have strict enrollment procedures, called eligibility criteria, which are listed in the trial (or study) protocol. Breast cancer clinical trials enroll participants who have been recently diagnosed with breast cancer or have undergone treatment for breast cancer, while others are limited to healthy women or who have certain risk factors for developing breast cancer.
• Clinical trials have led to many medical advances in breast cancer, such as mammography use as a screening tool, lumpectomy and radiation therapy instead of mastectomy and the use of tamoxifen to treat some forms of breast cancer and to reduce the risk of someone getting breast cancer.

You can find more information about clinical trials in the Facts for Life: Clinical Trials resource.

Participation in Clinical Trials by Black and African American Women

Overall, Black and African American women are not well-represented in clinical trials for any disease. This limits how much we know about this population and which treatments, for example, would be most beneficial to them based on various biological factors1, 2. According to the National Cancer Institute (NCI) data, Black and African American women with breast cancer are significantly less likely to participate in clinical trials compared to white women. During the years of 2000 to 2002, NCI-sponsored breast cancer clinical trials enrolled 1,393 African American women compared to 17,344 white women3.

Why is it important to participate in a clinical trial?

Clinical trials of treatment trials, for instance, offer the chance to try new treatments and possibly benefit from them. Learning a new therapy is better than the standard treatment can also help others. And, as new therapies are developed, they can open doors to other drugs and procedures that may be even more effective.

Without representation from Black and African American women in clinical trials, researchers cannot know whether there are specific methods or treatments that work best with those populations. Improving the participation of Black and African American women will allow researchers to study cancer types and determine if the prevention, screening, diagnosis or treatment studied in the trial will also benefit this population.
In order to improve enrollment of Black and African American women in clinical trials it is important to provide information about the process, risks and the potential benefits to themselves and to other women with breast cancer. You can use the following strategies for talking to your audience about clinical trials:

☐ Ensure all communication, verbal and non-verbal, is both respectful and culturally-appropriate (see Applying Culturally-Responsive Communication in Black and African American Communities).

☐ Define clinical trials as research studies where people volunteer to participate to test the effectiveness and safety of possible new ways to prevent, detect, diagnose and treat diseases.

☐ Discuss at least two common barriers associated with clinical trials, such as the following:
  • Distrust of the medical and research communities
  • History of past invasive and unethical research (e.g., The Tuskegee Syphilis Study)
  • Lack of opportunities to join because of limited access to health care
  • Lack of information from physicians about ongoing clinical trials

☐ Explain that clinical trials are vital to continue to provide new treatment options for patients as well as new methods in detection, diagnosis and treatment.

☐ Explain that clinical trials go through rigorous approval process before approved.

☐ Encourage those who are interested in participating in a clinical trial to consult their doctor first. Suggest that they ask their doctor what opportunities are available for them to participate in ongoing research. Encourage them to take the time to discuss the opportunity with family members and/or friends before committing to enroll in the trial.

☐ If they do decide to participate in a clinical trial, encourage them to thoroughly read and ensure they understand the informed consent form. Emphasize that they can chose to leave the trial at any time.

☐ Provide one or more resources on the topic of clinical trials. Some resources include:
  • Facts For Life: Clinical Trials
  • Research Fast Facts: Clinical Trials
  • Clinical Trials page on Komen.org

Deciding to enroll in a clinical trial is very personal. Encourage your audience members to decide if enrolling in any research study or clinical trial is right for them. This decision can also be made between an individual and her/his doctor. Encourage women to ask the doctor and the research team questions. A quick guide for questions to ask the doctor can be found in the Questions to Ask Your Doctor: Clinical Trials resource.
Where to Find a Clinical Trial
BreastCancerTrials.org in collaboration with Susan G. Komen® offers a custom matching service that can help you find a clinical trial that fits your health needs.

CenterWatch clinical trials listing service
www.centerwatch.com

Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups
www.cancertrialshelp.org

National Cancer Institute (NCI) clinical trials website
www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials

National Institutes of Health (NIH) clinical trials websites
www.cc.nih.gov
www.clinicaltrials.gov