THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE AND CANCER WORRY ON COLON CANCER SCREENING AMONG OLDER CHINESE-AMERICAN WOMEN

Objectives: This study investigated the hypothesis that adherence to colon cancer screening guidelines among Chinese women was associated with Eastern cultural views and anxiety about developing colon cancer.

Design: Cross-sectional data from a community-based longitudinal study were used to examine the hypothesis of this study. Measures of sociodemographics, medical access factors, cultural views of health care, cancer worry, and practices of colon cancer screening were administered by a computer assisted telephone interview.

Participants: Four hundred and thirty-three Chinese-American women from Metropolitan Washington, DC age 50 years and older and without a history of colon cancer completed the telephone interview.

Main Outcome Measure: Adherence to utilization of either fecal occult blood test (FOBT) within a year, sigmoidoscopy within five years, or colonoscopy within 10 years was used to define two outcome categories: current screeners and noncurrent screeners.

Results: Controlling for covariates, this study found that: 1) women with more Eastern cultural views were less likely to be current screeners; 2) women who thought about the chance of getting colon cancer had approximately three-fold greater odds of being current screeners than women who never thought about colon cancer; and 3) women receiving physician recommendation for colon cancer screening had more than three-fold increased odds of being current screeners than those who had not received a recommendation.

Conclusions: In addition to the lack of physician recommendation, older Chinese women face cultural and psychological barriers to obtaining timely colon cancer screening. These barriers may be reduced through culturally sensitive intervention studies.

INTRODUCTION

Colon cancer is the second most common cancer and the third leading cause of cancer-related death among the Chinese-American population. Chinese Americans have higher colon cancer death rates than non-Hispanic Whites and are more likely to be diagnosed with late-stage colon cancer than Japanese and White women. Despite this disease burden, little research has been done on Chinese-Americans' colon cancer screening practices.

In 2001, overall US self-reported colon cancer screening rates (including use of fecal occult blood test [FOBT], sigmoidoscopy, or colonoscopy) were 45%–48%. In contrast, only 22%–31% of Chinese women report ever having had FOBT and sigmoidoscopy, and among these women who ever had FOBT, just 38%–42% report an FOBT in the past year. These data are consistent with previous data that indicate that Chinese women also underutilize breast and cervical cancer screening.

Lower rates of cancer screening in Chinese women may be the result of several unique cultural and psychosocial barriers, beyond commonly recognized barriers such as lack of healthcare resources and physician recommendation. For example, traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes natural approaches to the treatment of disease (eg, herbal medicines and balanced food). Furthermore, in Chinese and other Asian cultures, cancer is viewed as an unpreventable and fatal disease.

Many older Chinese women believe that thoughts about cancer may eventually cause cancer. Additionally, Chinese women generally perceive themselves to be at lower risk of developing cancers compared to Caucasian women. Given such beliefs, we believe that Chinese-American women who hold Eastern cultural views may be disinclined to obtain colon cancer screening.

This community-based study was designed to evaluate cross-sectional associations between Chinese-American women’s cultural views of care, level of worry about the risk of cancer (cancer worry), and use of colon cancer screening tests. We hypothesized that women with more Western cultural views would be more likely to report adherence to colon cancer screening than women with more Eastern views after considering other factors. In addition, based on reports that correlate cancer worry with likelihood of breast cancer...