

Cancer Health Literacy in Black Women With Breast Cancer: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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BACKGROUND: Patients with cancer have unique health literacy needs that affect health outcomes. In regard to breast cancer, Black women are more commonly diagnosed with high-grade breast tumors and have increased mortality rates.

OBJECTIVES: This review examines the role of health literacy and discusses health disparities that affect cancer health literacy and health behaviors in Black women with breast cancer.

METHODS: A literature search was conducted using CINAHL®, PubMed®, Ovid®, and Google Scholar™. A total of 12 studies were identified and included in the final review.

FINDINGS: Women with breast cancer in racial minority groups are less likely to report knowing or answering questions correctly for multiple tumor characteristics, have a lower quality of life related to low health literacy levels, and are at an increased risk for inadequate health literacy because of socioeconomic inequities. Unmet health literacy needs can potentially lead to poor self-management, poor medication adherence, increased hospitalizations, negative perceptions of health, and compromised quality of life.

KEYWORDS

health literacy; cancer health literacy; breast cancer; Black women

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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DURING THE PAST DECADE, CANCER MORTALITY RATES have decreased, yet the socioeconomic mortality gap in cancer has widened despite advances in treatment and the vast amount of health information accessible to the public (Alcaraz et al., 2020). Black women with breast cancer are more commonly diagnosed with high-grade breast tumors versus low- to moderate-grade tumors (DeSantis et al., 2019), and have a 39% higher mortality rate compared to White women who have a higher overall incidence of breast cancer (Susan G. Komen, 2023). Increased research attention is aimed toward understanding and optimizing health literacy in patients to mediate social determinants of health. Several determinants contribute to the longevity of health inequities, including structural racism, socioeconomic status, access to resources, discrimination in health care, and provider biases (Jones et al., 2022; Sutton et al., 2021; Vo et al., 2021). Until the 1990s, health literacy focused on a patient's recognition and understanding of health terms. More recent definitions describe health literacy as one's ability to comprehend and use health information to navigate health resources and communicate with healthcare providers (Parnell et al., 2019).

Purpose

Cancer health literacy is a precedent to positive cancer health behaviors. Low health literacy levels can introduce barriers that notably affect individual health behaviors, health perceptions, and overall outcomes in patients with cancer (Samoil et al., 2021). Defining health literacy and its functionality in the individual and organizational sectors of health care is a major initiative of Healthy People 2030, which also aims to advance health literacy goals and improve health in the future (Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021; Santana et al., 2021). Literature demonstrating the association between cancer health literacy levels and clinical outcomes of Black women with breast cancer is limited. Therefore, the purpose of this comprehensive clinical literature review is to examine the role of health literacy in patients with breast cancer and to discuss health disparities that may affect cancer health literacy, health behaviors, and health outcomes in Black women with breast cancer.

Methods

A literature review was performed using CINAHL®, PubMed®, Ovid®, and Google Scholar™ to identify relevant literature on studies performed in the