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Original Communication

A Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial to Increase Breast Cancer Screening Among African American Women: The Black Cosmetologists Promoting Health Program

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Background

: African American women have disproportionately higher rates of breast cancer mortality than all other ethnic groups, thus highlighting the importance of promoting early detection.

Methods

: African American women (N = 984) from San Diego, California, participated in a randomized controlled trial testing the efficacy of breast cancer education sessions offered in beauty salons. Cosmetologists received ongoing support, training, and additional culturally aligned educational materials to help them engage their clients in dialogues about the importance of breast cancer early detection. Posters and literature about breast cancer early detection were displayed throughout the salons and cosmetologists used synthetic breast models to show their clients how breast cancer lumps might feel. Participants in the control group received a comparable diabetes education program. Baseline and 6-month follow-up surveys were administered to evaluate changes in women's breast cancer knowledge, attitudes, and screening behaviors.

Results

: This intervention was well received by the participants and their cosmetologists and did not interfere with or prolong the client's salon visit. Women in the intervention group reported significantly higher rates of mammography compared to women in the control group. Training a single educator proved sufficient to permeate the entire salon with the health message, and salon clients agreed that cosmetologists could become effective health educators.

Conclusions

: Cosmetologists are in an ideal position to increase African American women's breast cancer knowledge and adherence to breast cancer screening guidelines.

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Keywords

breast cancer; screening; knowledge; attitudes; beliefs; African Americans

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