

Cancer risk perception could lead to adverse health outcomes among women

May 16 2016, by Jeff Sossamon

According to recent studies, the U.S. has a disadvantage in women's life expectancy compared to peer countries despite high rates of health screenings such as mammography and popular national awareness campaigns. Recently, researchers at the University of Missouri examined the perceptions of risk among females and found that minority and less educated women believe that breast cancer, rather than heart disease, is the more common killer. Based on these findings, they recommend that health care providers should incorporate healthier lifestyle strategies for heart disease with messages for improved breast health to greater impact disease outcomes.

"Part of the Affordable Care Act is designed to help health care providers identify strategies to encourage the population to live healthier and prevent [breast cancer](#) and [heart disease](#)," said Julie M. Kapp, associate professor in the Department of Health Management and Informatics in the MU School of Medicine. "But before we can develop these targeted approaches, we have to understand the perceptions and behaviors of our audience—in this case, premenopausal women."

Breast cancer is a leading cause of death for females in the U.S. where one in 30 women will die of breast cancer. The death rate for heart disease is significantly higher at one in seven. Obesity remains at the top of health care providers' concerns.

"The pink ribbon is one of the most recognizable symbols in the world and is associated with a very effective campaign, which might relate to

the perception that breast cancer is a more common killer than other women's health issues," Kapp said. "Perhaps because of this, we found that minority women and women with a college education or less had greater odds of believing that breast cancer, rather than heart disease, causes more deaths in women yearly. Additionally, a quarter of the women surveyed reported that they are not making healthy lifestyle changes related to breast health, even though [premenopausal women](#) have the most to gain in knowledge and behaviors over their lifetime."

Researchers suggest that progress toward improving U.S. population health requires that [health care providers](#) use strategic opportunities to leverage healthy and active lifestyle messages for obesity and heart disease, in combination with breast [health](#). These messages also should be targeted to different cultural and ethnic backgrounds as well as education levels, Kapp said.

More information: The study, "A Strategy for Addressing Population Health Management," recently was published in *Public Health Management Practice*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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