

What *every* woman should know

Cancer's burden falls disproportionately on some racial and ethnic minorities, low-income and non-English-speaking people, and those who lack health insurance. For example, African Americans have the highest mortality rates from breast cancer of any racial group, according to the American Cancer Society, and the incidence of cervical cancer is highest in Hispanic or Latina women.

As part of Dana-Farber's commitment to narrow such disparities, the Women's Cancers Program (WCP) is taking an educational and cancer screening program to underserved communities. Carried out in collaboration with DFCI's Community Benefits Program and Marketing Department, Dana-Farber/Brigham and Women's Cancer Center (DF/BWCC) physicians, and Boston's Mammography Van, the program is designed to provide information on cancer risk and prevention.

"This is an extension of a lecture series called 'What Every Woman Should Know' that DFCI offered at the Institute," explains Candace Lowe, ScD, administrative director of the WCP. "Now, we are bringing medical expertise out to those in the community who might otherwise lack information and access. We think of this as a pilot program and hope that this series can be a model for improving access to care for other diseases."

Using interpreters when necessary, DF/BWCC doctors lecture on the topics of breast and/or gynecological cancer, offering tips on staying healthy and leaving time to answer questions. Then, Dana-Farber Mammography Van staff give a presentation on the services available. Attendees can sign up for an appointment the day of the lecture or any time before the van returns, usually in two weeks.

"We had an excellent turnout for the spring series," says Karen Ruderman, MPH, MSW, program director, Boston's Mammography Van. The traveling program visited four sites: Mujeres Unidas en Acción (Women United in Action) in Dorchester, Mass.; Long Island Homeless Shelter in Boston; South Bay Women's Prison; and Kit Clark Senior Center in Dorchester. "Even though Dana-Farber's doors are open to everyone, cultural and linguistic barriers, financial and transportation issues exist," says Ruderman. "This program allows us to reach further into the community to invite people in."

Those who are uninsured and of low income are encouraged to enroll in the Women's Health Network Program

New effort brings screening, information to the underserved

through Dana-Farber/Partners Breast and Cervical Screening Collaborative (BCSC), an initiative supported by DFCI and Partners HealthCare with additional funds from the state. The BCSC links women with primary care physicians and helps them receive the appropriate referrals for breast and cervical health services.

This fall, the program continues with visits to places of worship and public housing sites.

"It can be intimidating for patients from underserved areas to get beyond the 'ivory tower' perception of the institution and come through our doors," says Elizabeth Garner, MD, a gynecologic oncologist at the Brigham and Women's Hospital and Dana-Farber. "Bringing members of the institution into the community will help break down barriers and show that the world-class care at Dana-Farber is for everyone, regardless of skin color, language, income, or insurance status." **DS**

Jennifer Ligibel, MD, talks about breast health at Kit Clark Senior Center in Dorchester, Mass.

