Examining Differences in Opportunity and Eligibility for Cancer Clinical Trial Participation Based on Sociodemographic and Disease Characteristics

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Purpose/Objectives: To examine differences in opportunity and eligibility for cancer clinical trial (CCT) participation based on sociodemographic and disease characteristics.

Design: A matched cross-sectional study including a prospective oral questionnaire and retrospective electronic medical record (EMR) review.


Sample: 44 Black or Hispanic and 44 Non-Hispanic White newly diagnosed individuals matched on cancer type and age (plus or minus five years).

Methods: Participants answered a questionnaire to capture self-reported opportunity for CCT participation, sociodemographic information, and cancer type. With consent, the authors completed a retrospective review of the EMR to assess eligibility and collect cancer stage and performance status.

Main Research Variables: Opportunity and eligibility for CCT participation.

Findings: Most participants (78%) had no opportunity for participation and were ineligible for all available trials. No differences were noted in opportunity for participation or eligibility based on race or ethnicity. Participants with late-stage disease were more likely to have opportunity and be eligible for CCT participation (p = 0.001). Those with private insurance were less likely to have opportunity for participation (p = 0.05).

Conclusions: Limited trial availability and ineligibility negatively influenced opportunity for CCT participation for all populations. Levels of under-representation for CCT participation likely vary within and across sociodemographic and disease characteristics, as well as across healthcare settings.

Implications for Nursing: The unique roles of nurse navigators and advanced practice nurses can be leveraged to increase opportunities for CCT participation for all populations.

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Racial and ethnic minority populations, older adults, and the economically disadvantaged are significantly under-represented as cancer clinical trial (CCT) participants (Murthy, Krumholz, & Gross, 2004; Sateren et al., 2002). Inequitable participation in CCTs decreases the generalizability of results and diminishes the chance for under-represented groups to receive new and potentially life-saving treatments. A large portion of literature on under-representation identifies patient attitudes as a barrier to CCT participation, but evidence challenges this view (Comis, Miller, Aldige, Krebs, & Stoval, 2003; Langford et al., 2014; Markman, Petersen, & Montgomery, 2008; Mohd Noor et al., 2013; Wallington et al., 2012; Wendler et al., 2006). Research suggests that under-represented groups are just as willing to participate in clinical trials as well-represented groups but receive fewer opportunities for participation (Wendler et al., 2006). Opportunity for participation is defined as an offer for screening and/or enrollment in a CCT from a healthcare provider or...