**African American Women Coping With Breast Cancer: A Qualitative Analysis**

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To determine how African American women cope with breast cancer.

**Design:** Descriptive and exploratory study.

**Sample/Setting:** 66 African American women diagnosed with breast cancer were interviewed in the southeastern United States.

**Methods:** Data were collected through tape-recorded interviews using a semistructured interview guide. Data were analyzed by content analysis and frequency distributions.

**Main Research Variables:** Coping strategies used by women to adapt to a diagnosis of breast cancer.

**Findings:** Coping strategies described by African American women included relying on prayer, avoiding negative people, developing a positive attitude, having a will to live, and receiving support from family, friends, and support groups.

**Conclusion:** Spirituality played a major role in these African American women coping with breast cancer. Supportive networks also served as a vital asset throughout the breast cancer experience. Participants discussed the need for culturally sensitive breast cancer support groups.

**Implications for Nursing:** Nurses must recognize coping strategies that African American women with breast cancer use. Healthcare professionals need to develop culturally sensitive breast cancer support groups. Throughout the breast cancer experience, nurses must assess communication patterns among African American families. Nurses should serve as healthcare advocates for African American women with breast cancer.

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**Key Points . . .**

➤ Coping strategies can play a vital role in how African American women adapt to their diagnosis of breast cancer.

➤ Nurses should seek to understand the significance of social support and spirituality on coping behaviors among African American women with breast cancer.

➤ Nurses must develop culturally sensitive interventions that will assist African American women and their family members in coping with breast cancer.

➤ Future research studies are needed to determine what are effective and ineffective coping strategies for African American women with breast cancer.

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**Literature Review**

**Definitions of Coping**

The term “coping” has been interchanged with words such as adaptation, mastery, resiliency, management, and adjustment (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1991; Garland & Bush, 1982; Roy & Andrews, 1999). The concept of coping has been linked closely with stress, in that coping involves a process by which a person attempts to restore equilibrium in response to a stressful life event (Compas, Connor, Osowiecki, & Welch, 1997; Lazarus, 1993; Monat & Lazarus, 1991). Mosby’s

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