

# Not a Death Sentence: Perspectives of African American Women Living With Lung Cancer

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**PURPOSE:** To conduct a descriptive, qualitative study to describe the experience of female African American lung cancer survivors, their perception of living with lung cancer, and their desire and ability to adopt positive health-related behaviors.

**PARTICIPANTS & SETTING:** The sample consisted of 18 African American women with a history of stages I–IIIa lung cancer. Three focus groups were conducted in a private conference center in two community hospitals in the southeastern United States.

**METHODOLOGIC APPROACH:** A 20-item questionnaire was used to collect demographic, health status, and behavior information. A trained moderator led the audio-recorded focus group discussions using a semistructured interview guide.

**FINDINGS:** Thematic analysis of the professionally transcribed data resulted in identification of four major themes. In addition, participants experienced stigma that influenced their perspectives on living with lung cancer.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING:** Healthcare professionals should provide culturally tailored communication and support for female African American lung cancer survivors. Additional research is needed to inform the development of interventions focused on health behavior change to enhance lung cancer survivorship in this vulnerable and understudied group.

Lung cancer is the second leading type of cancer among adults and accounts for 25% of all cancer deaths in the United States (American Cancer Society, 2017). In 2017, an estimated 225,000 new cases of lung cancer were diagnosed in the United States, and 155,000 people died as a result of that diagnosis (American Cancer Society, 2017). These lung cancer incidence and mortality rates are startling. Even more disconcerting are the health disparities experienced by African Americans diagnosed with lung cancer. Although early detection, screening practices, and improved treatment help increase survival rates, the overall five-year survival rate of African American patients with lung cancer (14%) is lower than that of Caucasian patients (18%) (American Cancer Society, 2016a). When cancer is diagnosed prior to metastasis, the disparity is even greater, with the five-year survival rates increasing to 47% for African Americans and 55% for Caucasians, respectively (American Cancer Society, 2016b; de Moor et al., 2013). Despite this notable disparity, knowledge is limited regarding the survivorship of African Americans, particularly African American women, with lung cancer. This knowledge gap translates to a lack of understanding of the experiences of this vulnerable and understudied population. Therefore, research that generates a deeper understanding of survivorship among African American women with lung cancer is imperative. To address this gap in the research, this study aims to describe the experiences of female African American lung cancer survivors regarding their perception of living with lung cancer and their desire and ability to adopt health-related behaviors.

Important factors related to survivorship in this population include investigation into reducing risk behaviors associated with cancer, such as tobacco use, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, and ineffective stress management. Reducing these behaviors improves overall quality of life (QOL) and survival rates among all cancer survivors (McDonnell, Bullock, Hollen, Heath, & Kozower, 2014; Parsons, Daley, Begh, &

**KEYWORDS** African American women; lung cancer survivorship; focus groups

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