Community-Based Mass Prostate Cancer Screening: Creating Opportunities for Informed Screening, Health Education, and Primary Care Utilization among African American Men

Lisa C. Campbell1*, Sydney Barnwell2, Amaris Tippey1 and Ave Maria Renard1

1Department of Psychology, East Carolina University, USA
2Craven Count Health Department, New Bern, USA

BABBREVIATIONS

USPSTF: U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

INTRODUCTION

Community-based prostate cancer screening has come under severe criticism in recent years as a result of recommendations against routine screening put forth by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force [1] and adoption of the recommendations by leading cancer organizations [2]. The USPSTF recommends against screening for early detection, regardless of age or individual risk related to family history or race [1]. Instead the Task Force recommends screening only in response to symptoms suspicious for prostate cancer and when the man seeking screening understands the potential benefits and harms of screening [1]. As a result of diminished support for routine prostate cancer screening, communities have seen a scaling back of such events by hospitals, clinics, and other community organizations who have traditionally partnered to conduct mass screenings. However, mass prostate cancer screening events have been an important source of health care for African American men without health insurance or access to primary care, and, surprisingly, for...
African American men who have insurance and primary care providers but still prefer to utilize community screening events for annual assessment of prostate health [3,4]. The USPSTF recommendations [1] and the science upon which they are based [5,6] have not fully addressed the risk-benefit ratio for African American men, thus leaving the group of men at highest risk for prostate cancer diagnosis and mortality to wonder about the relevance of these recommendations to them.

This brief survey study was conducted to provide preliminary data about health-related topics of interest to African American men who attended a mass prostate cancer screening event. The event that was the setting for this study had a 10-year history of providing annual prostate cancer screening focused primarily on African American men in the community. Below, the community-based approach used to design and implement the study is described, followed by a summary of results and discussion of future implications of study findings for improving health literacy among African American men.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Setting

An annual community-based prostate cancer screening event, coordinated by a community hospital in partnership with a county health department, was the setting for collecting preliminary data from African American men about health-related topics that would be of interest at a future screening event.

Eligibility and informed consent

All men attending the event for the purpose of undergoing prostate cancer screening were eligible to complete the brief checklist. The checklist and procedures for anonymity of participants was approved by the Institutional Review Board of East Carolina University. Prior to undergoing prostate cancer screening, participants received a brief description of the purpose of the checklist, received a packet of educational materials about prostate health and prostate cancer screening, and were asked if they would be willing to complete the checklist anonymously. Acceptance and completion of the checklist constituted consent. The checklist included potential educational topics of interest and men were instructed to check only those topics they would like to learn more about. They were also asked to provide their age and race. No unique personal identifiers were collected.

Data analysis

Analyses included descriptive statistics for participant age (means and standard deviation) and topics of interest (frequencies by percentage), and t-tests to examine possible age differences in educational topics of interest. Approximately 98% of participants were African American. For the purposes of this paper, the remaining 2% of participants who were Caucasian were not included in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 182 African American men completed the educational topics checklist prior to undergoing prostate cancer screening. Mean age of men was 57.1 years (SD 8.1). Median age was 57.0. Age range of participants was 40 to 77 years.

Educational topics of interest

The greatest numbers of men were interested in having information about men’s health (68.7%), anatomy and physiology of the prostate (56%) and exercise (55.5%). Topics of least interest to men included information related to communicating with the doctor and information on family history related to prostate cancer (28.6%), and communicating with their doctor (also 28.6%). Nutrition, sexual health, and financial resources were of interest to a moderate percentage of men (54%, 50%, and 40%, respectively; see Table 1).

Age differences

T-test analyses indicated an age difference related to the educational topic of communicating with doctor. Men who reported an interest in educational information related to communicating with their doctor were older on average than men who did not express an interest in this topic (59.6 (SD 8.1) vs 56.2 (7.9) years old, t (171) = -2.49, p = .014). Age differences were not observed in any other topic area among men who expressed an interest in the topic and men who did not.

DISCUSSION

For African American communities across our state, mass prostate cancer screening events have been viewed as an important source of health care for African American men who have prostate cancer mortality rates nearly 3 times that of Caucasian man [7]. These screening events have traditionally drawn men without health insurance as well as men with health insurance who are reluctant to engage with the health care system [3,4].

However, the importance of mass prostate cancer screening events for African American men may go beyond prostate cancer. Communities that have been successful at encouraging African American men to be proactive about their prostate health by attending an annual mass prostate cancer screening event, are likely to be successful at helping men to be proactive about other aspects of their health and help to cast health care seeking as normative behavior.

Amid concerns about routine prostate cancer screening and the current emphasis on informed screening, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Established patterns of attending community-based prostate cancer screening can
serve as a foundation upon which to enhance informed decision making about screening and build other habits related to preventive health care. The findings presented here suggest that African American men participating in a mass prostate cancer screening event still perceive gaps in prostate health literacy in particular and men’s health in general. Thus mass health events with an informed screening component represent an opportunity to improve prostate health literacy as USPSTF guidelines recommend but also provide a venue for broader education on men’s health issues in a setting in which men are likely to be more receptive to health education.

Given that high prostate cancer mortality rates persist among African American men in the U.S. and consensus around the importance of informed screening, even among organizations with disparate viewpoints related to prostate cancer screening, it is important to maximize the educational potential of community-based events that have been traditionally used for prostate cancer screening. It can be argued that merely stopping mass screening events, as has been recommended by some, puts often hard-to-reach populations of African American men even further out of reach. Well-established and long-running events that have drawn large numbers of African American men in the past, can be important future venues for developing and testing educational approaches to enhance informed decision making about prostate screening and other health screening decisions.

CONCLUSION

Promoting overall health literacy and informed screening among men who may not readily seek or utilize primary care requires that we study the educational needs of men in the mass screening settings they have come to rely on to meet a portion, albeit narrow, of their health care needs. Using established patterns of attending community-based prostate cancer screening as a foundation upon which to build other habits related to prevention and to conduct informative research requires a carefully paced approach that is driven by the interests of the men themselves. In this brief communication, we described such an approach that was designed to gather preliminary data on health-related topics of interest to African American men attending a mass screening event, for the ultimate purpose of enhancing the educational aspects of future community health events, whether there is a screening component or not. Toward this end we believe this pilot study is significant in laying the groundwork for conducting future research in such settings. Additional research is needed to more comprehensively assess the broader educational needs and interests of African American men who continue to seek prostate cancer screening and to examine the most effective ways to promote informed screening among this group of men in both primary care and community screening settings.

REFERENCES