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Increasing Access to Clinical and Educational Studies

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The Increasing Access to Clinical and Educational Studies

The Increasing Access to Clinical and Educational Studies (ACES) project is one of 18 Special Populations Networks (SPNs) for Cancer Awareness Research and Training, funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), Center to Reduce Cancer Health Disparities. Each SPN focuses on the cancer-related health disparities (i.e., differences in incidence, prevalence, mortality, and disease burden) among specific population groups (e.g., ethnic and racial minorities and the medically underserved). The SPN initiative is part of NCI's response to the Department of Health and Human Service's commitment to identify and address the underlying causes of higher levels of disease and disability in racial and ethnic minority communities by the year 2010. Each SPN establishes partnerships between NCI-designated cancer centers, academic institutions, NCI-recognized clinical trials cooperative groups, and community-based organizations. These cooperative relationships are used to promote participation of minority scientists in cancer control research, foster cancer awareness activities, and support participation of minority populations in cancer prevention and treatment clinical trials.

The goal of the Increasing Access to Clinical and Educational Studies (ACES) project is to increase cancer awareness and research involving African American and other special populations in the Philadelphia area. Specific aims of the project are to:

1. Create an infrastructure that facilitates cancer awareness education and research related to African Americans and other special populations.
2. Recruit and train minority scientists who have the potential to lead NCI-funded pilot studies.
3. Design and implement pilot studies involving African American and other special populations.
4. Increase awareness related to cancer among African Americans and other special populations.
5. Submit new research grant applications to the NCI and other peer-reviewed funding sources based on the work done in the pilot studies.

The first year of the project (April 2000 to March 2001) focused on creating an infrastructure for research, including a steering committee of both academic and community-based representatives, an expert panel of scientific advisors, and working groups to oversee development of pilot proposals studies related to breast and prostate cancer. Other aspects of infrastructure development included establishing collaborative relationships with the Cancer Information Service (Atlantic Region), the Health Promotion Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and the American Cancer Society, Commonwealth Division, Southeast Region and community partnerships with Main Line Health Congregational Nurse Network and Methodist Hospital Parish Nurse Program. These and other community partnerships under development facilitate access to health care providers with established relationships in the African American and other special population communities.

We have recruited, and are working with, the project's first four Special Populations Investigators [SPIs] (a.k.a., minority scientists) who are preparing pilot studies that focus on developing and testing culturally appropriate educational interventions. Two pilot studies already have received NCI support: (1) Preparing African American Women For Breast Biopsy, and (2) Aiding African American Men In Making An Informed Choice (about participation in a prostate cancer prevention clinical trial.)

Thomas Jefferson University is unique in that it is the site of two Special Populations Network (SPN) grants. Edith Mitchell, MD, clinical professor of medicine in the Division of Medical Oncology, is the principal investigator of the other. This SPN is working with African American physicians in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, DC in collaboration with the National Medical Association.

About the Author

Ronald E. Myers, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University.