

Module 1: What Is Cancer?

Review the Objectives (Time Frame: 10 minutes)

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Have a general understanding of cancer and cancer prevention.
- Understand the American Cancer Society's recommendations for reducing the risk of cancer.

Worksheets/Handouts

- *Cancer Facts & Figures 2008* (www.cancer.org)
- *Cancer Facts & Figures for African Americans 2007–2008* (www.cancer.org)
- *Cancer Prevention Facts* (www.cancer.org)

Materials/Resources

- Blackboard/chalk or dry erase board
- Pens or pencils
- Notepads or extra paper
- Internet access

Welcome the participants. Tell them that today's module will focus on developing a clear understanding of cancer.

Overview

Open the session by discussing the following points:

- Cancer occurs when cells in a part of the body begin to grow out of control. Normal cells divide and grow in an orderly fashion, but cancer cells grow and crowd out normal cells. Although there are many kinds of cancer, they all have in common this rapid growth of cells.
- Different kinds of cancer behave very differently. For example, lung cancer and breast cancer are very different diseases. They grow at different rates and respond to different treatments. That's why people with cancer need treatment that is aimed at their kind of cancer.
- Sometimes cancer cells break away from a tumor and spread to other parts of the body through the blood or lymph system. They can settle in

new places and form new tumors. This is called metastasis (meh-tas-tuh-sis). Cancer that has spread in this way is called metastatic cancer.

- Even when cancer has spread to a new place in the body, it is still named after the part of the body where it started. For example, if prostate cancer spreads to the bones, it is still called prostate cancer. If breast cancer spreads to the lungs, it is still breast cancer. When cancer comes back in a person who appeared to be free of the disease after treatment, it is called a recurrence.
- African Americans are much more likely to die from cancer than any other racial or ethnic group and are more likely than whites to be diagnosed with cancer at a more advanced stage, which makes it harder to treat.

You may find it helpful to copy the cancer points onto a PowerPoint slide so that the participants can follow along as you discuss the points. You could also copy and paste the points into a Microsoft Word document and pass them out to the participants. A detailed overview of cancer can be found on the American Cancer Society's Web site at www.cancer.org.

Suggested Activities (Time frame: 25 minutes)

Activity 1 – In Search of the Truth

Pass out copies of *Cancer Facts & Figures 2008* and *Cancer Facts & Figures for African Americans 2007–2008*. Ask participants follow along as you make the following points listed on the handout:

- Rates of prostate cancer are 60 percent higher in African-American men than in white men, and death rates are nearly two-and-a-half times higher. In African-American men, prostate cancer is the most common type cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death. More than 4,000 African-American men died of prostate cancer in 2007.

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- Lung cancer rates are 47 percent higher in African-American men than in white men. Although the death rate from lung cancer has been dropping among African-American men, it is still 36 percent higher than for white men. Lung cancer is claimed more than 16,700 African Americans lives in 2007, making it the leading cancer killer in our community.
- Colorectal cancer rates are also higher among African Americans than among whites, for both men and women. And although death rates from the disease have dropped, the decline has been greater among whites. Colorectal cancer is the third leading cause of cancer death among both African-American men and women. It killed over 7,000 African Americans in 2007.
- Breast cancer is the most common cancer among African-American women, and the second leading cause of cancer death. More than 19,000 new cases occurred in 2007. Breast cancer is less common among African-American women than among white women – except in the case of women under 40. Young African-American women have higher rates of the disease than do young white women. Although African-American women overall are less likely than white women to get breast cancer, they are more likely to die from it. About 5,830 African-American women died of breast cancer in 2007.

Ask participants to discuss why there is a significant gap between the prevalence of cancer in African Americans and whites. The American Cancer Society suggests:

- Poverty is certainly one reason. African Americans make up about 13 percent of the US population, but 24 percent of the nation's poor. Poverty may lead to lower quality health care that in turn leads to later diagnosis and a worse outcome.

- Lifestyle may also be a factor. Smoking is more common among African-American men than among white men, which may help explain the differences in lung cancer cases and deaths. Being overweight or obese, which can raise the risk of many cancers, is more common in African-American women than in white women. Overall, African Americans are less physically active than whites. Getting enough exercise can lower the risk of some cancers.

Activity 2 – Prevention is Key

Pass out *Cancer Prevention Facts*, a notepad, and a pen to each participant. Ask participants to review the information. Remind the participants that what they eat and drink, how they live, and where they work can affect their risk for cancer. Encourage the participants to read more about risk factors. Write the most common risk factors on the board. Ask participants to discuss realistic ways to minimize cancer risk factors.

Activity 3 – Getting the Church Involved

Ask the participants if they are interested in forming a cancer awareness committee at the church. The committee can meet regularly to discuss how to educate congregants and the community about cancer. The committee could host health fairs, walks, and health forums; invite guest speakers to church events; or even arrange for cancer screenings to take place at the church. They could create flyers to place in common areas within the church and community, and hand out fact sheets and other educational items. Ask the committee to brainstorm ways that they can bring cancer awareness to future events within the church and community. Designate a committee leader to formally type the minutes from the session and present the ideas to the pastor or health ministry leader. Encourage the committee members to contact the American Cancer Society and other community organizations to assist with events as appropriate.

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Reflections (Time frame: 10 minutes)

Ask participants to announce any behavioral changes that they can make to reduce their risk of developing certain cancers. Ask the participants to discuss to the possibility of:

- Exercising regularly.
- Eating a healthy well-balanced diet.
- Quitting smoking or, even better, never starting.
- Limiting alcohol use.
- Getting regular cancer screenings.
- Performing monthly breast self-exams.
- Using sunscreen.

Allow time for questions and comments about the topics discussed in the session today.

Additional Resources

Medical Insurance and Financial Assistance for the Cancer Patient

As a cancer patient, you may have many financial resources available to you, including health insurance, government programs, disability benefits, aid from voluntary organizations, and living benefits from life insurance policies. If you have no medical insurance, other options are available. To order this fact sheet, please contact American Cancer Society 1-800-227-2345. You may also view this information online at www.cancer.org.

Nearing the End of Life

Many patients and family members have questions about what to expect during their last months of life. You may have some of the same questions. The information shared here has been written to address questions that patients and family members ask about what to expect during their last six months of life. To order this fact sheet, please contact American Cancer Society 1-800-227-2345. You may also view this information online at www.cancer.org.

Support for Survivors and Patients

Join our community of cancer survivors and families through online message boards, the Cancer Survivors Network, and support groups. To order this fact sheet, please contact American Cancer Society 1-800-227-2345. You may also view this information online at www.cancer.org.

Children and Cancer

Information and resources about children with cancer and children with a family member who has cancer. To order this fact sheet, please contact American Cancer Society 1-800-227-2345. You may also view this information online at www.cancer.org.