

# The Health Care Professional's Guide to Connecting With Black Patients From Screening to Breast Cancer Care

Tips and advice for creating a care plan that's clinically and culturally competent for your Black female patient.

Understanding your patient is vital to developing a care and treatment plan that reflects her unique needs. This guide has recommendations to help your Black patients feel comfortable, heard, and understood in all your interactions.

**Black women with breast cancer are approximately 40% more likely to die compared to white women in the United States.<sup>1</sup>**

## What is equitable care?

Equitable care is providing care that does not vary in quality due to personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, geographic location, and socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup>

## Self-assessment for ensuring an unbiased experience

We all have biases. Have you ever stopped to consider potential biases in your interactions with Black patients? For example, when you think about the last time you treated a Black patient, what was your interaction like? Did you consider:

- ✓ How the needs of your Black patients differ from your white patients?
- ✓ All the possible ways to provide a care plan that gives your Black patients care that is equitable to your white patients?
- ✓ Whether your patients have the support resources needed to successfully navigate their breast cancer experience?

# Establishing trust

## Put yourself in her shoes

If she's quiet, she may be processing what you shared and thinking of the many people who are relying on her or who she may want to share this journey with. Give her time to process what she's hearing. If needed, consider bringing in support such as a nurse or patient navigator.

Black patients may feel unseen or unheard when visiting their doctor, which could cause them to shut down and not share critical information that could make all the difference in their treatment.<sup>4</sup> Consider this data from a Harris Poll of 1,012 U.S. women:

- ✓ Only around half of all women feel their providers spend enough time listening to their health concerns (54% Black, 49% white) and respect them (52% Black, 44% white).<sup>4</sup>
- ✓ Among Black women who believe they have experienced prejudice or discrimination within the medical health care system based on their race, 53% report that it's difficult to find a health care provider who makes them feel heard and seen.<sup>4</sup>

**Black providers  
comprise only  
~2% of practicing  
oncologists.<sup>3</sup>**

**It is essential to vocalize and offer reassurance that she will receive quality care and have the full support of the cancer care team.**

## Here's how you can help establish trust with your patient

### Connect:

- By maintaining eye contact when greeting her
- Through engaging her in conversation to create a safe space that encourages openness
- Over something that she shares to establish common ground

### Ask:

- About the check-in process and if the front desk was kind and respectful
- Whether today's visit is causing her any concerns and if so, why
- If she has a care support circle and whether she'd like to include them in her care plan or keep her diagnosis private
- About the people who depend on her

### Explain:

- The statistics impacting Black women and why you're committed to being part of the solution
- Her diagnosis and the treatment plan you're recommending, and why
- How important it is that she made this step to prioritize her health

## If your patient seems hesitant or reluctant to get screened:

- ✓ Highlight why you're recommending screening and its importance
- ✓ Ask about her family history (maternal and paternal)
  - If she doesn't know, encourage her to find out what she can and share her discovery at her next visit
  - If she discloses a family history of cancer, remind her of the importance of being vigilant due to higher risk factors
- ✓ Explain various screening options and which option is most accurate in detecting abnormalities
- ✓ Explain how long it will take to get the results and what to expect when the results come in

**Black women are nearly twice as likely as white women to receive a breast cancer diagnosis at an advanced stage of the disease.<sup>5</sup>**



“ Health care professionals need to accept some level of responsibility for the devastating mortality rate difference (41%) between their Black and white patients. Black women deserve a Black standard of care. True health equity will come when doctors use the golden rule by giving the same standard of care to patients that they would expect for themselves and their families. ”

**Ricki Fairley**

Co-founder and CEO of TOUCH, The Black Breast Cancer Alliance and More Than Just Words Advisor

## If cancer is detected:

Let her know you are prioritizing her care, are aware of the statistics - reminding her she is more than a number and are committed to helping her achieve an optimal outcome.

- ✓ Ask her whether she'd like to pause and reach out to someone in her support circle to be part of her care plan discussion, as appropriate
- ✓ Explain what she should expect next and if possible, provide a care roadmap
- ✓ Share how together, you can help her decide the best treatment options, including whether a clinical trial is right for her situation
- ✓ Ask if she would like to be connected to another patient who has been through a similar experience as a breast cancer support partner/guide

**Black patients constituted only 3% of participants in the breast cancer clinical trials that led to U.S. Food and Drug Administration approvals between 2008-2018.<sup>6</sup>**

## Questions to create a more productive dialogue

### Instead of asking:

✗ Do you understand everything I just shared?

✗ Are you married or do you have family to help you?

✗ Do you have the means to pay for your treatment?

✗ Do you need to speak with a psychiatrist?

### Ask this:

✓ What questions do you have about what I just shared?

✓ Who would you like to be part of your breast care journey?

✓ What can I share about cost of treatment and access programs to help you make the best decision for you and your loved ones?

✓ I know this may be difficult and you may be feeling anxious. Can I help you with that?

