

Community Outreach and Translational Core: Linking Scientists and the Community through the Research Process.

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The Breast Cancer and Environment Research Centers form a national network of four multidisciplinary research projects to study the effects of exposure to environmental agents on the development of the mammary gland. It is known that puberty is a critical window of susceptibility due to the rapid growth of the mammary gland. By further understanding the determinants of early pubertal maturation researchers and advocates alike hope to discover the time course for risk factors for breast cancer. The contribution of the environment in the etiology of breast cancer has been of intense interest to communities and advocates for some time and the role of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), who supports the BCERCs along with the National Cancer Institute (NCI), has been critical in promoting the importance of collaborations between researchers and communities. Each of the four centers has a Community Outreach and Translational Core (COTC) that provides a bidirectional link between scientists and communities most likely to benefit from the information being generated by research. The long-term objective of the COTC's is to develop and implement strategies to bring community concerns and questions to the scientists on an on-going basis, to translate the scientific findings of the centers into information for public and policy makers, and to determine if these strategies are effective.

Although the models of community involvement differ in each COTC, all are based on active participation of breast cancer advocacy groups and other relevant community groups in the conceptualization, planning, implementation and dissemination of research findings. Each COTC has developed and initiated area-specific activities aimed at engaging early community participation and support for the Center's research. These activities include: involving advocates in the grant writing process, hosting science and education workshops, producing targeted newsletters, assisting in recruitment, forming community advisory groups, sponsoring town hall meetings, creating developmentally appropriate educational materials and integrating advocates into the scientific projects and the planning of the Centers' annual scientific conference.

The rationale for including advocates in the research process as well as specific information on the different COTC models and activities aimed at engaging early community participation and support for the Center's research will be presented. The unique opportunity the Centers provide to evaluate the influence community participation has on breast cancer knowledge, programs and policy as well as on the research itself and the community and academic research partners involved in the centers will be addressed.

Keywords: Breast Cancer Advocates, community based participatory research, outreach, translation, education