

Adolescent Breast Cancer Prevention, Risk Reduction and Education Project

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Background:

The Adolescent Breast Cancer Prevention, Risk Reduction and Education Project was developed in 2003 in recognition of the growing scientific evidence that early life events play an important role in the development of breast cancer, and the onset of puberty is thought to be a key event influencing subsequent breast cancer risk. Adolescence and puberty, when the immature mammary gland is growing rapidly, may be a time when the breast is particularly sensitive to exposures such as tobacco smoke and other environmental carcinogens. Research has suggested that adolescent choices regarding diet, alcohol and exercise can affect later breast cancer risk. Developmentally, adolescence is an appropriate time to focus on creating positive attitudes toward protective behaviors such as nutrition and regular exercise.

Objective:

The major objective of the Adolescent Breast Cancer Prevention, Risk Reduction and Prevention pilot project was to determine whether a single lesson breast cancer “module,” delivered through peer educators, is an effective model for disseminating research findings on breast cancer prevention, and for motivating adolescents to reduce their risk of breast cancer by practicing healthy behaviors and minimizing exposures to known and suspected environmental carcinogens.

Methodology:

This Pilot Project was a partnership among Zero Breast Cancer, the Tamalpais Union High School District and Sir Francis Drake High School in Marin County. Twelve peer educators, ages 15 – 18, were trained. A breast cancer module, targeting 275 adolescent girls and boys ages 13 –15, was created to provide information on breast cancer factors, environmental exposures, and preventive health practices. Peer educators presented messages stressing the importance of physical activity, healthy nutrition, early detection, and avoidance of specific environmental carcinogens.

Program evaluation included outcome and process measures, emphasizing participant outcomes. Two types of outcome methods were used – student assessments (pre-post test) and focus groups. The key outcome evaluation questions were:

- Are knowledge and attitudes about breast cancer impacted by participating in the project?
- Is the content of the “module” personally relevant to those participating?
- To what extent are students able to develop a personal action plan using the information presented?

Conclusion:

The results of the evaluation demonstrated that a single lesson breast cancer prevention, risk reduction and education” module” delivered through peer educators is an effective model for disseminating research findings on breast cancer and for motivating adolescents to reduce their potential risk for breast cancer.