Barriers and opportunities for breast cancer organizations to focus on environmental health and disease prevention

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Breast cancer organizations are key research stakeholders

• BC orgs advocated for research on the environment

• New evidence supports links between the disease and chemicals

• Expert panels recommend reducing exposures
Main questions

• Are breast cancer organizations incorporating research results into their work?

• What barriers and opportunities influence their ability to focus on environmental factors?
A Mixed-Methods Approach:

• Used a Python script to evaluate frequency of 36 environmental factors and 16 other risk factors on the websites of 81 BC organizations and 2 national cancer organizations (NCI and ACS)

• Conducted 2 focus groups and 20 interviews with leaders of breast cancer organizations

Risk Reduction: Quick Precautionary Tips

• Seek using safer alternatives to toxic pesticides in and around the house: www.beyondpesticides.org
• Choose organic produce when possible and learn about the “Clean 15” and “Dirty Dozen”: http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/summary.php
• Choose storing food and beverages in stainless steel and glass containers instead of plastic
• Look for fabric or hemp shower curtains instead of plastic ones.
• Keep sales receipts, which may contain BPA, to a minimum in your pockets or pocketbook.
• Choose cosmetics that don’t contain parabens, triclosan and artificial fragrances. (phthalated) Also avoid cosmetics using “nanotechnology.” http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/ Download EWG’s Cosmetic App.
• Avoid using non-stick pans which contain the carcinogen “PFQAs.”

http://greatneckbcc.org/breast-cancer-precautionary-tips/
BC organizations’ websites have limited discussion of environmental factors

• 40% organizations include information on environmental chemicals on websites

• Twice as many organizations (82%) discuss other risk factors (family history/genetic, lifestyle, pharmaceutical)
BC org websites most frequently mention factors related to lifestyle or family history/genetics (N Total=81)

| Factor       | % of Organizations that Mention (N) | Number of total mentions |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Exercise     | 74 (60)                             | 2796                     |
| Family History | 67 (54)                           | 1167                     |
| Diet         | 59 (48)                             | 1514                     |
| Genetics     | 52 (42)                             | 1257                     |
| Alcohol      | 48 (39)                             | 722                      |
| Factor            | % of Organizations that Mention (N) | Number of total mentions |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Flame retardants  | 12 (10)                             | 1704                     |
| Air pollution     | 11 (9)                              | 80                       |
| PAHs              | 11 (9)                              | 104                      |
| PFAS              | 11 (9)                              | 230                      |
| Oxybenzone        | 7 (6)                               | 18                       |

BC org websites less frequently mention specific environmental chemicals
• Mentions of environmental risk factors is rare.
• Organizations tend to specialize in one or the other.
Despite lack of online information, leaders of BC organizations are concerned about environmental links

• **Barriers:**
  • Time and resource constraints
  • Unsure about science and limited expertise
  • Difficulties with messaging
  • Downplaying of environmental risks by industry
  • Lack of institutional leadership
What would help?

• Increased access to experts
• Easy-to-adopt educational programs
• Supporting national organizations in research communication
• More funding for scientist-advocate research partnerships

“If there was a program even on the environment that was already structured that [my organization] could just do, but I didn’t have to work at putting it all together, that would be wonderful.”
NCI and ACS’ websites* more frequently mention family history/genetics or lifestyle factors

| Factor            | Mentions on NCI | Factor            | Mentions on ACS |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Family history    | 249             | Exercise          | 340             |
| Breast density    | 171             | Diet              | 172             |
| Genetics          | 140             | HRT               | 100             |
| Exercise          | 96              | Body weight       | 77              |
| HRT               | 37              | Family history    | 74              |

*BC-specific pages only*
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| Genetics       |                 |                |                 |
| Exercise       |                 |                |                 |
| HRT            |                 |                |                 |

Factors with no mentions on either website’s breast cancer-specific pages: phthalates, flame retardants, air pollution, PAHs, PFAS (e.g., PFOA, PFOS), oxybenzone, bisphenols (e.g., BPA)
Discussion and conclusion

• Great potential to enrich outreach efforts with up-to-date, meaningful, and culturally sensitive information on environmental factors

• Experts and trusted cancer organizations can increase research translation activities

• Previous research demonstrates economically/culturally diverse populations want information

• Need, however, to acknowledge the significant institutional barriers to breast cancer organizations focusing on the environment
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