

## An African American, military veteran, patient advocate breast cancer perspective

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### Abstract

In the United States African American and white women are diagnosed with breast cancer primarily at the same rate, 1-9 and 1-8, respectfully. African American women get breast cancer at a lower rate than white women, yet African American women are 42% (31.0 per 1000,000) more likely to die of breast cancer than other ethnic groups. African American women face both disproportionate exposure carcinogens and environmental factors, putting them at a higher risk of latent presentation and death of the disease. In a breast cancer study, at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington DC establish military women are 20% to 40% more likely to develop breast cancer than civilian women. This and other studies result suggest that even with an equal access model African American women are still presented with aggressive and later stage breast cancer.

The increased incidence of ER-negative and Triple Negative breast cancer in African American women are facing unique challenges. These challenges include environmental factors, biology, cosmetic ingredients, health utilization, structural violence, fear, and chosen trauma. In addressing these issues requires health care professional to gain skills in cultural competencies and transformational listening in order to gain a clear perspective of the patient's mental mindset. This is especially true in treating military service and military veteran. Researchers surveyed over 700 private healthcare providers across the state, from New York to the small farming towns of western New York. They concluded that physicians, mental health counselors, and radiologist, oncologist, and breast surgeons almost none had served in the military. Less than 1/3rd knew enough about military culture to talk with veterans on their own terms. To further add less than half screened their patients for conditions common among women veterans, such as have they served overseas, sexual assault, burn pits, and jobs that that are environmentally harming.

The purpose of this presentation is first, that even with an equal access military health care system, African American woman are at greater risk of dying of breast cancer. Second, that biology, environmental, and health utilization are contributing to the survival disparity. Third, that in order for medical professional to address the conflict requires comprehension of cultural competencies and transformational listening to affect change. Last, that in order to incorporate change there must be a breast cancer survivor patient at the table. This is someone that

represents the whole and is closet and understand breast cancer fears, anxiety, and cultural norms in order to elevate breast cancer issues. Anyone cannot speak to what we experience every day and will deal with for years, this is a must.



### Biography:

Tanja S. Thompson is a 2x breast cancer survivor, retired disabled military veteran, marathon runner, author of *What to Expect When you Weren't Expecting Breast Cancer*, and transformational speaker. She shares her breast cancer journey, life, personal challenges, death in her compelling TEDx Talk, "From Tradegey to Triumph." She shares her Pearls of Wisdom as a means to see the triumph and light in her life. Just because you have breast cancer life doesn't stop, it continues. Her Pearl's of Wisdom were her tools to MOVE past the darkness and into the light. Tanja brings this journey to life by paying homage to her grandmother, Willie Mae Harris who taught her how to pray and to have Faith.

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