
Part I: An Implementation Guide For



THE
WITNESS
PROJECT®

**A Culturally Competent, Community-Based
Cancer Education Program For
African American Women**



THE WITNESS PROJECT®

MISSION STATEMENT:

The Witness Project® is a culturally competent, community-based, breast and cervical cancer education program through which cancer survivors and lay health advisors increase awareness, knowledge, screening, and early detection behaviors in the African-American population in an effort to reduce the mortality and morbidity from cancer.

**In church, people witness to save souls,
At *The Witness Project®*, they witness to save lives!**

STATEMENT OF NEED:

African Americans have the highest overall age-adjusted rates of cancer incidence and mortality of any United States population group. Despite a somewhat lower incidence rate, the five-year survival rate for African American women with all stages of breast cancer is notably lower than the rate for white women. And, African American women are twice as likely to develop cervical cancer and nearly three times as likely to die from it. Pap tests, pelvic exams, mammography, clinical breast exams (CBEs), and monthly breast self-examination (BSE) are proven methods for increasing the early detection of cervical and breast cancer, and decreasing death. Poor, minority, and elderly women, however, especially in rural areas, are less likely to practice cancer screening.

Background

Witness programs are presented in the African American community through local churches or other organizations.

In church, people witness to save souls.

At *The Witness Project*®, they witness to save lives!

At the heart of *The Witness Project*® are African American women who talk to other women about the importance of early detection of cancer -- either as Witness Role Models (WRMs) or Lay Health Advisors (LHAs). They challenge women to take care of their health and that of their families, friends, and neighbors. They help people develop behaviors that focus on preventive health and appropriate medical care.

Witnesses or WRMs are African American women who are breast or cervical cancer survivors and who *witness* -- or talk -- about their cancer experiences.

Although the program remains focused on breast and cervical cancer education, our WRMs include women who have survived other cancers; and who have responded to our call for survivors to “witness”.

WRMs answer questions about their personal experiences, fears and concerns. Their presence as survivors is seen as a blessing and proof that cancer is not an automatic death sentence.

As cancer survivors, WRMs demonstrate:

- It's okay to talk about cancer.
- Cancer is not a punishment.
- God is still with them.
- There are ways for women to take care of themselves, such as having regular mammograms, pelvic exams, and Pap tests.
- Women have a right and a duty to take care of themselves.

Women who have survived cancer assume new spiritual and social importance from working in the project. They are able to take the lead in creating cancer education awareness within their communities because of their cancer experiences.

LHAs are women who are not cancer survivors themselves, but want to work with the project. They can organize and publicize programs, network with community people, answer questions about services, and teach breast self-examination (BSE).

WRMs and LHAs do not have to be recruited from any particular churches and should be expected to reach African American women through any church, social, or community group.