

# WCHS NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2019



## Women's Circle of Health Follow-Up Study: Update

### On behalf of the Study Team, Happy New Year!

First of all, we want to thank all of you for agreeing to participate in the **Women's Circle of Health Follow-Up Study**. Our participants are all African American breast cancer survivors from 10 counties in New Jersey. (highlighted in orange). Be assured that we take your time seriously and will ensure that your information is both kept confidential and used in the best way to increase our scientific knowledge on breast cancer in African American women. Many of you are curious about results. This type of study takes many years to accumulate enough data to draw any solid conclusions. However, we have a very talented team of investigators both at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and at Roswell Park Comprehensive

Cancer Center in Buffalo, New York working on the study and will be producing results in the near future. Since we started the follow-up study in 2014 with a grant from the National Cancer Institute, over 600 women have completed follow-up visits. Our grant will be ending in 2019, but we hope to obtain more funding to continue the study. That will depend on its success and for this WE NEED YOU!

**Help us continue to study breast cancer survival in African American women by agreeing to participate when we call you!**

In this newsletter we also wanted to give you an update on our team of interviewers so that you know them when they

call you to schedule a visit. We also have talented new investigators studying several aspects important to survivors such as neighborhood, dietary, behavioral, and molecular factors. They all have recently been recognized at the national level by the National Institutes of Health. We are committed to studying breast cancer disparities. You can learn more about the investigators in this newsletter.

**Let's continue to work together to improve our knowledge of breast cancer in African American women! Thanks so much for your time and your help with the study.**

*Dr. Elisa Bandera,  
Principal Investigator  
Rutgers Cancer Institute of NJ  
New Brunswick, NJ*



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### Why is it important to schedule your visit when we call you?

In studies like this it is very important that we obtain complete information and the same kind of information in all women so that when we analyze the data as a group we have the best data quality. Also, for that reason, we need to collect information from all women in the same time window since your diagnosis (e.g., the first follow-up visit is approximately 2 years after your diagnosis).

We know that you are very busy with so many other things in your life. We can work with you to find a time that is convenient and **hope you can find some time for medical research when we call you.**



### In the NEW YEAR: YOU

We also hope you find some time for YOU this year. New guidelines for nutrition and physical activity recommend a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and limiting unhealthy foods such as fast foods and sodas. Try to maintain a healthy weight by eating a healthy diet, moving more, and sitting less. See page 4 for current recommendations for cancer prevention.

# Meet our interviewers

We are so lucky to have an excellent and passionate team of interviewers who visit our many participants.



**Victoria Dickson**

Victoria has over 10 years of phlebotomy experience. She is looking forward to expanding her experience and education in oncology research.

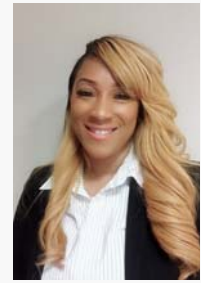
*"One thing I love about my job is meeting participants and learning about their different experiences with breast cancer."*



**Nakia McCall**

Nakia has over 10 years of experience in clinical settings, and is passionate about breast cancer research.

*"It's been such a humbling experience to be able to help people while learning and bringing science together in a meaningful way to improve people's lives."*



**Monique Higgins**

Monique just joined our team. She comes with over 15 years of phlebotomy experience and is looking forward to meeting you!

*"Show compassion, and always be willing to help someone."*

## Michelle Doose



Michelle Doose is a PhD student at Rutgers School of Public Health. She is supported by a training grant from the National Cancer Institute to join the study team and learn new research skills. Before coming to Rutgers, Michelle was a health educator helping cancer survivors navigate health and wellness after cancer. Now she is studying how type 2 diabetes and hypertension are managed during cancer treatment. Both health conditions are common among breast cancer patients.

Michelle presented on early research findings at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey in October. Based on the data collected in our study, we found that most diabetics received at least one blood glucose test during their breast cancer treatment. Primary care providers were more likely to order blood glucose tests than oncologists. However, less than half of diabetics had a blood glucose level less than 8.0% during cancer treatment. This is important because receiving routine diabe-

tes care and maintaining a healthy blood glucose level are associated with better health outcomes and reduced risk of preventable complications.

Michelle wants to better understand how medical teams and health systems can help cancer patients with chronic health conditions achieve their best health. She plans to continue her research at the National Cancer Institute as a Cancer Prevention Fellowship Program postdoctoral fellow in June 2019.



## Dr. Jesse Plascak

Dr. Jesse Plascak joined the Rutgers School of Public Health and study team as a social epidemiologist in Fall 2016. Before arriving at Rutgers, he spent three years as a researcher in Seattle, Washington. He has two very creative and imaginative children, who most likely got those qualities from his creative wife of ten years. When not working, Dr. Plascak likes to run outside, cook, and hike. His research studies

how health can be influenced by the communities in which we live. More and more evidence is indicating that the way our communities are built and maintained can either promote or harm our health.

As part of the study team, Dr. Plascak is measuring how walkable and how stressful NJ communities are. This information can be used for two main pur-

poses with the goal of ultimately improving health. First, the community measures of walkability and stress will be linked to your data about physical activity and stress so that we can determine if the community measures relate to your measures. If they are, we can then tell community planners that investments in walkability and other factors that cause stress might lead to improved health among residents.



## Dr. Bo (Bonnie) Qin

Dr. Bonnie Qin is a nutrition and cancer epidemiologist. Her research focuses on understanding how modifiable lifestyle factors influence breast cancer outcomes. Lifestyle modifications, such as smoking cessation, diet choices, and exercise are important for breast cancer survivors. These lifestyle behaviors are also associated with a decreased risk of developing cardiovascular disease in general. You probably still remember we asked a list of questions about your dietary

choices. We are trying to understand what dietary factors are critically important for disease outcomes among black women. We are most grateful for your time and contribution. Those findings are impossible without you!

Recognizing the prevalence of poor cardiovascular health profiles (e.g., unhealthy diet, obesity, hypertension, etc.) among black breast cancer survivors, Dr. Qin proposed a study,

which received a five-year federal grant support, to identify neighborhood barriers (such as food environment) to optimal cardiovascular health in African American breast cancer survivors. The findings will provide insight into evidence-based neighborhood interventions, and clinical strategies to collectively improve breast cancer outcomes among black women.



## Dr. Adana Llanos

Dr. Adana Llanos is a molecular epidemiologist, with expertise in population health and cancer health disparities. Her primary research focuses on understanding molecular factors and sociobiologic mechanisms that cause cancer disparities. She additionally studies cancer epidemiology and surveillance in Caribbean populations. Dr. Llanos' research studies center on cancers that disproportionately affect minority and medically

underserved populations. As recognition of cancer disparities has grown, efforts to move beyond documenting the issues and towards understanding causes and developing impactful interventions have also grown. Her work has contributed to this important national and international agenda. Dr. Llanos has several ongoing research collaborations, which aim to address disparities and achieve

health equity. Some of her recent research has been featured in the news, including an analysis of data from the Women's Circle of Health Study (published in *Carcinogenesis* in September 2017). Findings showed that black women who reported using dark hair dye shades had a 51% increased risk of breast cancer overall and white women who reported using chemical relaxers/straighteners had 74% increased risk of breast cancer overall.





## About the Women's Circle of Health Follow-Up Study

### Women's Circle of Health Study

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- ⇒ Funded by the National Cancer Institute
- ⇒ Collaboration of Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, Rutgers School of Public Health, & the New Jersey State Cancer Registry
- ⇒ Our aim is to understand breast cancer in African American women, in particular how obesity and related diseases such as diabetes and hypertension and their treatments, affect survival and quality of life after a breast cancer diagnosis

### Resources for cancer survivors:

For nutrition and physical activity advice, visit  
**American Institute for Cancer Research:**  
<http://www.aicr.org/patients-survivors/resources-for-you/>

Advice from the **American Cancer Society:**  
<https://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment.html>

## AICR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANCER PREVENTION

*A Blueprint to Beat Cancer*

To prevent cancer, people should aim to follow as many of the 10 Cancer Prevention Recommendations as possible. However, any change you make that works toward meeting the goals set out in the Recommendations will go some way to reducing your cancer risk.

### EAT A DIET RICH IN WHOLE GRAINS, VEGETABLES, FRUITS AND BEANS

Make whole grains, vegetables, fruits and pulses (legumes) such as beans and lentils a major part of your usual daily diet



### LIMIT CONSUMPTION OF RED AND PROCESSED MEAT

Eat no more than moderate amounts of red meat, such as beef, pork and lamb. Eat little, if any, processed meat



### LIMIT CONSUMPTION OF SUGAR-SWEETENED DRINKS

Drink mostly water and unsweetened drinks



### LIMIT CONSUMPTION OF "FAST FOODS" AND OTHER PROCESSED FOODS HIGH IN FAT, STARCHES OR SUGARS

Limiting these foods helps control calorie intake and maintain a healthy weight



### LIMIT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

For cancer prevention, it's best not to drink alcohol



### FOR MOTHERS: BREASTFEED YOUR BABY, IF YOU CAN

Breastfeeding is good for both mother and baby



### AFTER A CANCER DIAGNOSIS: FOLLOW OUR RECOMMENDATIONS, IF YOU CAN

Check with your health professional about what is right for you



### DO NOT USE SUPPLEMENTS FOR CANCER PREVENTION

Aim to meet nutritional needs through diet alone

<http://aicr.org>



Not smoking and avoiding other exposure to tobacco and excess sun are also important in reducing cancer risk.

Following these Recommendations is likely to reduce intakes of salt, saturated and trans fats, which together will help prevent other non-communicable diseases.