

Implementing a Multifaceted Strategy to Overcome Challenges in Participant Recruitment within Diverse Populations

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Background

In 2019, Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center (SKCC) collaborated with the University of Delaware on a clinical trial analyzing the value of a family-based program for African American parents/primary caregivers with newly diagnosed solid tumor cancer and their adolescent children.

Objective: Fostering improved family communication and mitigating depressive symptoms in adolescents.

Eligibility Criteria: African American parents and caregivers (e.g., grandparents) diagnosed for the first time with Stages 0, I, II, or III solid tumor cancer in the last 24 months who are caring for an 11-21 year-old child at home who has been told about the parent's cancer diagnosis.

Intervention: Participants are placed into one of two remote, group-based therapy programs where one involves parents only (standard treatment protocol for cancer-related mental health services) or with parents and children (intervention group).

The trial encountered initial recruitment challenges, including complications related to COVID-19 pandemic and staff turnover, resulting in lower-than-anticipated accrual.

Goals

Allocate a study team with the capacity to oversee participant recruitment and engagement

Successfully enroll five or more participants within six months

Reach out to potential participants via TJUH tumor registry

Leverage multiple channels to broaden outreach

Solutions and Methods

To improve enrollment, the study transitioned its staffing in 2023 to the Recruitment Enhancement Service (RES) team within SKCC's Clinical Trials Office. Their experience with patient outreach and collaborative partnerships with internal departments and external organizations was leveraged to increase trial accruals.



Key Outcomes

The study encompasses all cancer diagnoses, presenting a unique challenge where standard recruitment practices, which typically rely on disease-specific criteria, cannot be directly applied.

After implementing our targeted recruitment strategies, we successfully enrolled **six** participants with **two** individuals scheduled for baseline assessments within six months.

The tumor registry proved to be the most effective method for identifying eligible candidates with **82** responses.

Email outreach was second with **22** responses.

Social media strategy was third with results yielding **4,500** clicks to the trial website and **one** response.

Challenges and Future Directions

Communication Barriers

Email & MyChart Messaging: Low response rate

Phone Calls: Unavailable to speak / invalid numbers

Socioeconomic/ Mental Health Barriers

Emotional distress due to diagnosis

Caregiver stress

Scheduling conflicts

Outcome

Delay in consenting

Delay in intervention

Low trial accrual

While we met our goals for this study, we struggled to overcome communication and socioeconomic barriers to enrollment.

We will continue to prioritize the utilization of the TJUH tumor registry and fostering secure relationships with internal SKCC groups and the broader community remains essential for effectively disseminating trial information to those who are eligible. We envision our model as a resource for studies with low participation, aiding them in their recruitment strategies.

