Multiple Myeloma and African Americans: Higher Incidence But Fewer Autologous Stem Cell Transplants

The incidence rate of multiple myeloma in African Americans has been about twice that of whites since 1975, and African Americans are twice as likely to die from this disease, according to SEER data from the National Cancer Institute. However, African Americans are receiving less intensive therapy with autologous stem cell transplants (ASCT) than whites.

A news article in this issue (p. 1608) focuses on the debate over the use of ASCT in multiple myeloma, but researchers have also looked at the disparity in treatment.

According to studies presented at the 2008 and 2009 annual meetings of the American Society of Hematology, African Americans are 50% less likely to undergo an ASCT for multiple myeloma. Researchers found that African Americans and whites have identical survival rates after undergoing ASCT.

“This suggests that equal treatment results in equal outcomes,” said Parameswaran Hari, M.D., assistant professor of medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin, in a news release. “More study is needed to correct the causes of this imbalance in transplant rates especially since the transplant treatment itself is equally efficacious but less likely to be applied in African Americans.”


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