

A POUND OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A TON OF CURE: THE BURDEN OF PREVENTABLE CANCERS IN MISSISSIPPI

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Abstract: According to the most recently-released data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, Mississippi has the second-highest overall age-adjusted cancer death rate in the nation. Closer examination reveals that most cancers contributing to this horrific statistic are highly-preventable cancers. Approximately forty percent of all cancer deaths in Mississippi are caused by two highly-preventable cancers: lung carcinomas and colorectal carcinomas. Furthermore, cancers which can be controlled via screening and lifestyle behaviors are the cancers which tend to exhibit significant population-based and geographic disparities throughout Mississippi. An epidemiological overview of major cancers will be described and compared to other states in the nation. Hypotheses will be presented to account for patterns observed with several cancers. For example, one hypothesis based on informational diffusion theory appears to accurately describe the influence of gastroenterologists and gastroenterology clinics as diffusional nodes which influence colorectal cancer screening behaviors and outcomes. More sophisticated multivariate models are required to accurately describe the influence of environmental, behavioral, biological and socioeconomic factors on cancer outcomes. It is proposed that the control of preventable cancers in rural states with high poverty levels will require not only sufficient health care capacity, but also a comprehensive strategy to address fundamental causes of health disparities.

Key Words: Cancer Prevention and Control; Geographic Information System (GIS); Health disparities; Community-level poverty; Health economics

Acknowledgements: The speaker acknowledges the invaluable contributions of Dr. Fazlay Faruque, Dr. Xu Zhang, Ms. Deirdre Rogers, the 70x2020 Colorectal Cancer Screening Partnership and the Mississippi State Department of Health; without their efforts this presentation could not have been developed. The speaker is the recipient of a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) Program Award (EA-1148-UMC).