



Media Contact:

Cheryl Deep
cell: 248-225-9474

cheryldeep@aol.com

Co-Investigator:

Heather Orom, Ph.D.

office: 313-576-8032

oromh@karmanos.org

INSTITUTE OF GERONTOLOGY

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Immigrants Unlikely to Report Family History of Cancer

A study of 5,010 persons living in the United States found that foreign-born residents are two-thirds *less* likely to tell their physician about a family history of cancer. Reasons for this are unclear but may include cultural and communication barriers, lack of awareness of cancer diagnosis, mistrust, and failure to understand the importance of relaying this information. Omissions in the family history may result in inadequate cancer screening and prevention that can ultimately lead to higher mortality rates among foreign-born patients.

The research appears in the January 15 issue of ***Cancer***, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society. Dr. Heather Orom of the Karmanos Cancer Center in Detroit and the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University, worked with four co-investigators to study data from surveys done in 2005 on Health Information Trends. Researchers also found that persons who were single, male, or without health coverage were less likely to report a family history of the disease. Previous research had already identified significantly lower rates of reporting a family history of cancer among African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans.

Based on these findings, Dr. Orom and her colleagues caution physicians to be aware that immigrants and ethnic minorities may have a strong genetic risk for certain cancers although they report no family history of the disease.