Using Social Media Platforms to Support Survivorship Equity Among American Indians/Alaskan Natives

The Disparity
Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer among American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) women, and a leading cause of cancer mortality. AI/AN women have lower rates of cancer screening across the U.S. than other races. There is a need for culturally relevant survivorship and education in AI/AN communities. Social media is an emerging tool that can distribute tailored messages and help connect cancer survivors to increase social support (Gentile et al., 2018).

Kwe Brave utilizes social media networks to support AI/AN women with the long-term and late effects of cancer treatment; general health and wellness, psychosocial and emotional health, and the appropriate surveillance screening schedules.

The Project
Kwe Brave began as a graduate research project in 2020 supporting the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan’s Three Fires survivorship equity program. Facebook and Instagram pages were created and branded “Kwe Brave” to acknowledge, connect and collaborate with AI/AN populations, and local county, tribal, and national health systems to address survivorship disparities among this underserved minority population. Kwe Brave is used to distribute culturally relevant messaging that supports breast cancer equity for AI/AN women.

The Results
Kwe Brave has expanded collaborations across tribal councils and health systems. In addition to culturally relevant graphics and messaging, Kwe Brave supports live online storytelling sessions that allow cancer survivors to share their experiences with health care workers and public health professionals. These online sessions highlight gaps in equity addressing the long-term and late effects of cancer treatment and survival among AI/AN women; physical, spiritual, psychosocial, and emotional wellness of our Kwe. The themes from these discussions provide the framework for graphics, messaging and outreach to organizations to improve cancer survivorship care.

The Conclusion
There is a need for culturally relevant cancer survivorship support for AI/ANs. Social media networks can provide support for cancer survivors through education, and shared resources, while providing space for vulnerable populations to share their experiences and help identify gaps in cancer care.

Future programs should consider social media campaigning and storytelling to reduce cultural barriers to cancer screening and prevention. More research is needed to study the impact of virtual sessions and social media messaging on cancer equity.