Innovative Strategies to Address the Unique Cultural Beliefs and Spiritual Perspectives of African American Patients and Families at the End of Life (TH309)

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Objectives
- Recognize the unique cultural and spiritual preferences of African Americans at the end of life.
- Recognize how clinicians and organizations are responding to the cultural and spiritual perspectives of African American in end-of-life clinical care and program development to understand what is happening in other healthcare settings in the United States.
- Identify an innovative strategy (that other programs can implement) using community based participatory research in developing a culturally tailored palliative care program for rural African American communities, with full community partnership.
- Gain insight into an effective method of designing culturally tailored programs that others can incorporate into their own programs.

African Americans face disparities in healthcare access and quality that extend throughout the life cycle, including end-of-life care. They report less satisfaction with end-of-life care and more concerns with communication, and are more likely to experience poor pain management than Whites. Compared to conventional care, hospice and palliative care improve outcomes for patients and families and may reduce some racial disparities in care; therefore, timely access to these services may improve the care of African Americans. Yet, although African Americans endorse a greater need for hospice services and may substantially benefit from expertise in communication and symptom management, they enroll in hospice at lower rates than Whites. While there is little research on their use of non-hospice based palliative care, similar concerns about underutilization of services exist. Cultural and spiritual beliefs among African Americans may partly explain their lower use of hospice and palliative care, including mistrust of the healthcare system, preferences for life-prolonging care, and spiritual beliefs about the redemptive nature of suffering and the occurrence of miracles. The goal of this symposium is to present innovative strategies to improve end-of-life care for African Americans which consider their unique historical, cultural and spiritual perspectives. Presenters will discuss (a) research on cultural beliefs and spiritual perspectives that may influence decision-making and clinical strategies to improve end-of-life care, (b) commonly employed and effective community outreach strategies among hospice facilities to improve access to care based on a national survey, (c) developing a culturally tailored palliative care program for African American rural older adults using a community-based participatory research strategy, (d) spiritual care at end of life by African American churches (presented by a pastor), and (e) a call to action. By presenting strategies that “meet them where they are,” this session moves beyond discussing barriers, to highlighting potential solutions for improving care for diverse populations.