CONSUMPTION, PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE OF SOY AMONG BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS IN TRININDAD

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Background: The eight series of the international soy symposium took place in Tokyo, November 9-12, 2008, which began in 1994. The low incidence of chronic diseases such as breast and prostate cancer, heart disease as well as hot flashes in Japan, stimulated interest in the early 1990s (Messina et al, 2009). This has evoked curiosity and perceived possibility of preventative and treatment properties present in soybean and its components.

Objective: There have been current issues surrounding the benefits of soy, but little information is available on the consumption, perception and knowledge of soy in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore the main objective of the study was to investigate the current consumption, perception and knowledge of soy among breast cancer survivors. Data was assessed, to investigate the relationship between knowledge and soy consumption.

Design: A cross-sectional survey was conducted, which involved the use of self-administered and interviewer-administered questionnaires. Each questionnaire had twenty-five questions, which comprised of socio-demographic data, general health, nutrition and lifestyle information, medical history, soy consumption history, prevalence and details of soy consumption, barriers to soy consumption, perceived benefits, and knowledge and awareness of soy.
A total of 105 women between the ages of 21 to 65+ years, living with a diagnosis of breast cancer in Trinidad were recruited at the he National Radiotherapy Centre of the St. James Medical Complex.Statistical analysis was implemented by the use of frequencies, Chi-Square analysis and Cronbach's alpha (coefficient alpha).

ResultsThe majority of the respondents were of African and Indian descent, and between the ages of 55 to 64 years. Roman Catholics and Christians were common among the study

population, and educational level attained was either primary or secondary school level. The minority (35.2%) of the breast cancer survivors represented soy consumers whereas 64.8% were non-soy consumers. However, there was no significant difference observed between soy consumers and soy non-consumers for the variables related to demographics, general health, lifestyle activities, source of nutrition information, and knowledge and awareness of soy. Although, the majority of soy consumers were neither aware nor knowledgeable of the benefits of soy, more soy consumers than non-soy consumers significantly perceived soy to be safe with a p-value of 0.003. It was also noted that soy consumers were significantly more likely to consume soy in the past than non-soy consumers. The most popular reason for soy consumption was general health where soya chunks, soya milk, soy sauce, tofu and soy burgers were among the top five consumed soy products. Although the majority of the soy products listed was never consumed, breakfast was the most favourable time for soy consumption closely followed by lunch. Of the 45.6% of non-soy consumers, the top three reported barriers for not consuming or no longer consuming soy were taste, cost of items and how to prepare soy. Health benefits were the overall perceived benefits of soy, where as tastefulness, inexpensiveness and conveniences portrayed neutral responses.

Conclusion: Even though the majority of breast cancer survivors valued their health, soy consumption did not influence knowledge and awareness of the benefits of soy, thus supporting the null hypothesis. However, past consumption and safety of soy were predictors of soy consumption. The study revealed that preparation of soy and reliable sources of nutritional knowledge needs to be addressed at the community level. A major finding was also exposed, where the majority of the breast cancer survivors reported no family history of breast cancer which proves there is desperate need for nutrition education.