INTRODUCTION

Poor, non-Hispanic black women ages 75 or older are more likely to use hospital Emergency Departments (ED) as a primary source of health care. Cervical cancer, which can be diagnosed at an early stage through regular pap tests and is preventable by HPV vaccination, occurs most often among black and Hispanic women. This study examined the characteristics and symptoms of women who used an ED in the year prior to a cervical cancer diagnosis.

METHODS

The emergency department and admissions data from the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development were linked to the California Cancer Registry. Women, over age 20, diagnosed with cervical cancer from 2010 to 2014 were included in the analysis (n=7,051). Those with an ED visit within the year prior to diagnosis were compared to those without a visit. Characteristics were compared using chi-square tests. Logistic regression was used to examine the association between ED use and sociodemographic factors.

RESULTS

In this group of 7,051 women with cervical cancer, 35% visited an ED in the year prior to diagnosis. Those diagnosed with stage IV disease were 3.62 times more likely to visit an ED than those at stage I. Black women were 1.49 times more likely to have utilized an ED than white women, and women in the lowest SES were 2.36 times more likely to have used an ED than women in the highest SES. Women ages 65 and older were 1.26 times more likely to have been treated in an ED than women ages 20 to 44. Among those utilizing an ED, 59% had symptoms indicative of cervical cancer (e.g., abnormal vaginal bleeding or dyspareunia) based on ICD-9 codes.

CONCLUSION

More than a third of women diagnosed with cervical cancer were treated in a hospital ED in the year before being diagnosed. These women tended to be black and have low SES, and they were substantially more likely to be diagnosed at an advanced stage of disease. Further studies should be undertaken to investigate the barriers to screening and vaccination and whether EDs could play a role in reducing the burden of cervical cancer in this population.

REFERENCES