Dr. Talley’s program of research focuses on the influences of quality of life among underserved populations within the context of chronic illness. Areas of interest include understanding the impact of disease-specific symptoms on the functional status of older adults and cancer survivorship. Her current research focuses on the functional status of older African American long-term breast cancer survivors.

Older women, in general, experience diminishing functional status as a result of normal progressive molecular, cellular, physiological changes, and comorbidities associated with the process of aging. Thus, older breast cancer survivors are particularly susceptible to functional deficits due to multiple vulnerabilities caused by the development of cancer and the induction of treatment.

Dr. Talley’s research addresses several national initiatives including the National Institute of Health, American Cancer society, Centers for Disease Control, Institute of Medicine (IOM), and Health People 2020; aimed at improving the understanding of health disparities. The IOM report, Women’s Health Research: Progress Pitfalls and Promise, highlights the inconsistent gain against breast cancer among all demographic groups. The efficacy of interventions has not been adequately evaluated in minority group women; therefore, more research is needed to develop effective interventions and prevention strategies that address improvement of women’s health.

Closer to home, Michigan’s health disparities are similar to the national rates. Racial and ethnic minority populations carry a disproportionately heavy burden from health disparities in the state. This burden is manifested in increased risk for disease, delayed diagnosis, inaccessible and inadequate care, poor health outcomes and premature death; much of which is preventable. There is also a call for the elimination of health disparities through enhanced efforts in disease prevention, health promotion, and appropriate healthcare delivery.

Dr. Talley’s research includes identifying factors associated with decline in functional status and quality of life of older African American breast cancer survivors. Next steps include development, testing, feasibility, and efficacy of an intervention designed to meet the needs of older breast cancer survivors in an effort to prevent disability and improve quality of life.