

Breast cancer returns more often in black women

Contrary to previous studies, African-American women with early-stage breast cancer who have surgery to remove the cancer (lumpectomy) followed by radiation therapy have a higher chance of their cancer coming back in the breast and lymph nodes 10 years after diagnosis, compared to their Caucasian counterparts, according to the largest study of its kind, presented at a scientific session October 29, 2007, at the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology's 49th Annual Meeting in Los Angeles.

The study also shows that early-stage breast cancer patients who are African-American women who are diagnosed with the disease at a younger age have a higher disease stage at diagnosis (larger tumors and cancer that has spread to the lymph nodes) and more aggressive tumors than Caucasian women who undergo similar treatment.

“This study confirms the aggressive nature of breast cancer in African-American women and emphasizes how important it is for all African-American women to see their healthcare providers regularly and to go for screening mammograms to try to catch any abnormalities early,” said Meena S. Moran, M.D., the lead author of the study and a radiation oncologist at the Yale University School of Medicine in New Haven, Conn. “This study also points out the need for further research in evaluating the underlying molecular, genetic and biological differences in breast cancers in African-American women so that we can develop better strategies for helping these women beat their cancer.”

For patients with early-stage breast cancer, the current standard treatment involves a lumpectomy, followed by radiation therapy to the breast over a five to six-and-a-half-week period to kill any remaining cancer cells.

The cohort study involved 2,382 patients over a 30-year period who underwent a lumpectomy and radiation therapy for early-stage breast cancer. Researchers wanted to find out if there were differences in the outcomes between AfricanAmerican patients and Caucasians. Findings showed that 10 years after treatment with lumpectomy and radiation, 17 percent of African-American women had their breast cancer recur compared with 13 percent of Caucasian patients.

Source: American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology

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