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African-American Women More Likely to Be Diagnosed with Higher Risk Breast Cancer

MedStar Washington Hospital Center Analyzes Data on Molecular Subtypes of Breast Cancer

Washington, D.C., June 9, 2014 – A research study led by cancer specialists at MedStar Washington Hospital Center found that African-American women frequently present with biologically less favorable subtypes of breast cancer.

Researchers at the Hospital Center's Washington Cancer Institute analyzed the biology of breast cancer in 100 African-American women, using a method of genomic profiling. These genomic tests look at the expression of genes associated with the risk of recurrence in the population and further characterizes the biology of the tumor. The 70-gene MammaPrint test was used to determine the likelihood of a cancer recurrence. Out of the 100 patients, 66 women in the study were found to be high risk, meaning that their tumors had a higher risk of recurrence.

A companion BluePrint test was used to define the specific molecular subtype of each cancer. When classified by both genomic tests, African-American women with stage I to III breast cancer often presented with gene expression subtypes that were less favorable. The co-author of the research, Raquel Nunes, MD, a medical oncologist at the Washington Cancer Institute, presented the data as a scientific poster at the recent American Society of Clinical Oncology annual meeting.

"It's important that research continues to address these issues comprehensively, from the biology of the disease to the development of optimal treatment and access to healthcare," said Dr. Nunes. "This work is particularly meaningful for us because it complements our interest in health disparities and highlights the enthusiastic participation of African-Americans in breast cancer research."

Unlike genetic tests such as those for BRCA genes (which are inherited and look at overall susceptibility for developing breast cancer), genomic tests look at the genes inside a breast cancer cell and how strongly they are expressed. The findings support prior research that has looked at the biologic characteristics of breast cancer in African-American women, but this specific methodology reported here was used for the first time in this population.

Cancer specialists will continue to follow the patients in the research study over the next five years to evaluate their survival with treatment, according to their gene profile.

<https://www.medstarhealth.org/washington/Documents/Genomic-Profiling-Breast-Cancer.pdf>



MedStar Washington Hospital Center

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MedStar Washington Hospital Center is a 926-bed, major teaching and research hospital. It is the largest private, not-for-profit hospital in the nation's capital, among the 50 largest hospitals in the nation and a major referral center for the most complex tertiary services. It consistently ranks among the nation's top hospitals as recognized by U.S. News & World Report. The Hospital Center is a respected top facility in the areas of cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes & endocrinology, gastroenterology & GI surgery, geriatrics, gynecology, nephrology, orthopaedics, pulmonology and urology. It operates MedSTAR, one of the country's top shock-trauma and medevac programs, and also operates the region's only adult burn center.