Adjuvant Therapy of Early Stage Breast Cancer: An Interesting History and Never-Ending Story

By Kevin R. Fox, MD, Director, Penn Browne Breast Center at Penn Medicine, Abramson Cancer Center and 2014 PA Breast Cancer Coalition Potamkin Prize Winner

The evolution of mammographic screening, and greater public breast cancer awareness, has led to one remarkable truth: most women diagnosed with breast cancer are potentially curable. In the simplest terms, surgical removal of breast cancer, along with removal of affected lymph nodes, may indeed cure the majority of women with breast cancer. However, the troubling fact remains that a significant minority of women, diagnosed with early stage disease, do not achieve long-term remission. While surgeons have continued to perform surgery on one hundred and forty thousand women, and in the last forty years, the effort to provide postoperative medical treatment to reduce the chance of such spread of breast cancer, a phenomenon known as “adjuvant therapy”, has been enormous, complex, and quite misguided, but never without the best intentions.

Now we find ourselves entering a new era, the “era of genomics”, in which an individual patient’s cancer can be analyzed and this analysis can be used to “redirect” a patient’s therapy to a more useful and less toxic form, in many cases.

The success of adjuvant chemotherapy has thus far allowed us to identify patients for whom chemotherapy may be completely unnecessary, and the intelligent use of genomics has reduced, rather than increased, the number of patients who receive chemotherapy at all.

The science of genomic testing is only in its early stages, and the level of sophistication in genomic testing will grow steadily in the next few years. For the time being, the conventional approach of chemotherapy and endocrine therapy will remain the standard for many patients, as well as the use of medications for patients who have been cured as shown of HER-2.

We remain hopeful that the use of cancer genomics will permit us to refine all of the approaches to the care of the individual, minimizing exposure to unnecessary treatments, while maintaining the most curing care for those with early stage breast cancer.
President’s Corner

You Can Save Lives: Complete the Dense Breast Survey

Knowledge is a power. And for the thousands of women in Pennsylvania, knowledge can be lifesaving.

When I was president of Hadassah, we honored Women’s Harrisburg as the setting for this year’s mcee. Ye Kathy Creola and Lynn Newcomer, Mary Bobst have been fantastic to work with.

According to Dr. Jennifer Pensinger, Board Chair of The PBCC, 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer at some point in their lives.

For over 20 years and breast density legislation has been an issue women face. Because of recent research, mammograms now required to notify women of dense breast tissue. 

The PBCC has developed a short survey for women who have received a mammogram since February 2014. To take this survey please turn to page 4 of this newsletter or do it online at www.PABreastCancer.org.

Take action. Take the survey. Save lives.

PBCC News

Batters Turn Out to Take a Swing Against Breast Cancer in Harrisburg, Lancaster, and Erie

The 7th annual Take a Swing Against Breast Cancer Home Run Derby was sponsored by Emeril’s Restaurant. The event at MetLife Bank Park on June 10th with nearly 100 batters, countless volunteers, and a stadium full of supporters.

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