

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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NEW GENETICS AND RISK-ASSESSMENT PROGRAM MAKES UT SOUTHWESTERN CENTER FOR BREAST CARE UNIQUE

DALLAS – November 21, 1997 – Two means of assessing a woman's risk of developing breast cancer — one for the general population and one for women with a family history of the disease — are being offered through a new program in the UT Southwestern Center for Breast Care.

Dr. David Euhus, assistant professor of surgery at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, has designed an interactive, comprehensive computer program that can provide either a general risk assessment or a genetic risk assessment. His computer program is an integral part of the new Mary L. Brown Breast Cancer Genetics and Risk Assessment Program, a component of the Center for Breast Care.

"We are thrilled about the new risk-assessment program, the most comprehensive of its kind in the nation," said Dr. George Peters, executive director of the Center for Breast Care and professor of surgical oncology. "It is designed not only to counsel women about their risk of developing breast cancer but also to educate them."

Ten percent of all breast cancer is thought to be due to an inherited genetic alteration that is passed from generation to generation. The rest of the approximately 180,000 new cases diagnosed yearly in the United States are most likely due to a complex interaction between genetic and other factors, including reproductive and hormonal history, lifestyle choices and environmental exposures.

General risk-assessment testing, which uses Euhus' computer program, can be completed in a single, 20-minute office visit. It considers family history of cancer as well as nonhereditary risk factors in order to arrive at the probability of developing breast cancer over the next 10 years, 20 years or a lifetime compared to the general population.

"Our goal is to educate without producing anxiety," Euhus said. "I think many women

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would be surprised to discover the sources of breast-cancer risk in their own lives, and perhaps, be encouraged to learn that many may improve their personal risk profiles by making a few lifestyle choices."

The genetic risk-assessment program, directed by Dr. Gail Tomlinson, assistant professor of pediatrics and director of the UT Southwestern Familial Cancer Registry, is designed for those concerned about a family history of breast cancer.

"All women are at risk for breast cancer, but family history puts some women more at risk than others," Tomlinson said.

Two office visits are required for genetic risk assessment. At the first visit, the patient completes an extensive questionnaire about family medical history with the help of an assessment team member. During the second visit, the patient and a genetic counselor discuss the patient's risk of breast cancer based on her family tree or history, which is derived from the previous visit's questionnaire. If appropriate, the patient is given options for further genetic testing.

Individuals with a family history of breast cancer also can join the UT Southwestern Familial Cancer Registry, a database of families with various types of cancer who participate in research studies at UT Southwestern.

The culmination of either type of risk analysis is a letter that explains the results and makes recommendations regarding future monitoring. For more information about the Mary L. Brown Breast Cancer Genetics and Risk Assessment Program, call the UT Southwestern Center for Breast Care at (214) 648-8969 and request an office appointment.

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