

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## **UT Southwestern researcher seeks minority women for study aimed at improving breast cancer survival rates**

DALLAS – Oct. 20, 2005 – A leading breast-cancer researcher at UT Southwestern Medical Center is seeking several hundred minority women who have had breast cancer or are at high risk for developing it for a study aimed at improving survival rates among Hispanic, Asian and black women.

The study is funded by a \$250,000 grant from the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

“The knowledge obtained in this study will be useful in tailoring breast-cancer genetic counseling and testing protocols to different populations, both locally and nationally,” said Dr. Gail Tomlinson, co-director of the Mary L. Brown Breast Cancer Genetic Risk Assessment Program in the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center. “This new knowledge will in turn help provide effective breast-cancer screening and early detection practices.”

Dr. Tomlinson is seeking to enroll Hispanic, Asian and black women who are considered at high risk of carrying a genetic predisposition to developing breast cancer. A woman is considered at high-risk if she has had breast cancer before the age of 40, has had breast cancer at any age and has a first-degree relative (mother, sister or daughter) who has also had breast cancer, or has not had breast cancer herself but has a family history of cancer with at least two first- or second-degree relatives with breast or ovarian cancer, at least one of which developed breast cancer before menopause.

Once enrolled, the women will answer questionnaires about their personal medical history, their family medical history and their general knowledge of genetic testing. They will also be asked to give a blood sample, but it is not mandatory.

Several previous studies found that minority women from different populations face up to a 70 percent greater risk of dying after a breast cancer diagnosis compared with Caucasian women. Earlier research has indicated that lack of access to regular mammogram screenings, lack of health information regarding early diagnosis and cultural taboos against discussing personal health issues contributed to the disparities in breast cancer outcomes for different ethnic groups.

In general, minority women are more likely to be diagnosed with advanced-stage breast tumors. And, breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths among Hispanic women in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society.

By reviewing family health history and through genetic screening for biomarkers, researchers at UT Southwestern are trying to identify at-risk patients and help them avert the disease.

“Armed with the genetic information, we can individualize a patient’s risk and recommend who will need more screening and who will need less,” said Dr. Tomlinson.

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Breast cancer is expected to kill more than 40,000 American women in 2005, while another 211,000 will be diagnosed with the disease this year.

Thanks to advances in screening and treatment, the five-year survival rate is up to 98 percent, if the cancer is caught very early, is limited to one breast and has not spread to the lymph nodes. Early detection is the key to success.

Minority women interested in participating in the study should contact research study coordinator Kristin Shelby at 214-648-1919.

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