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Why Do Some Women Develop Breast Cancer Earlier than Others?

Clinical Trial at CINJ Expanded to Include More Healthy Volunteers to Help Find the Answer

New Brunswick, N.J., July 14, 2009 – Research currently underway at The Cancer Institute of New Jersey (CINJ) and CINJ-Hamilton, which may unlock the mysteries of why some women develop breast cancer at an earlier age than others, has been expanded to include more healthy volunteers than previously sought. CINJ is a Center of Excellence of UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

According to state health statistics, roughly 13 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer in New Jersey are younger than age 45, while nearly half of the women diagnosed with the disease and seen at CINJ are not yet 50. Investigators hope to shed light on these figures through an ongoing clinical trial whose goal is to identify genetic markers for the disease. By including larger numbers of healthy women in the study, the researchers hope to pinpoint genetic differences between women who develop breast cancer and those who don't.

It was recently discovered in the laboratories of CINJ member Arnold J. Levine, PhD, professor of pediatrics and biochemistry at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; and CINJ medical oncologist Kim M. Hirshfield, MD, PhD, that some genes may be associated with increased risk of developing breast cancer, while others may actually protect against the development of the disease. These same gene variations may also play a role in breast cancer outcomes.

Dr. Hirshfield, who also is an assistant professor of medicine at UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, is the lead investigator of the current study: "If we are able to identify these slight variations, we can learn more about how breast cancer develops and its outcomes. This information could one day lead to more tailored treatment for those with the disease and perhaps even better prevention methods and screening recommendations." She notes the majority of women diagnosed with breast cancer have no known risk factors, and that only five to ten percent of breast cancers are actually caused by changes or mutations in known breast cancer genes.

Study participants will have blood drawn for laboratory analysis. The sample will be used to obtain blood cells as well as DNA, the material that makes up a person's genes. Facts about one's breast health and overall medical history will be documented. Both the blood sample and the clinical information will be analyzed and saved for possible future use.

Investigators are looking for more than 3,000 participants to complete the study. Women and men aged 18 or older with no history of breast cancer, with a diagnosis of breast cancer, or a breast abnormality indicating increased risk for development of breast cancer are eligible to take part in the trial, although other criteria must be met. For more information on how to take part, individuals should call the study team at 732-235-7428 or e-mail: harrisja@umdnj.edu.

Clinical trials, often called cancer research studies, test new treatments and new ways of using existing treatments for cancer. At CINJ, researchers use these studies to answer questions about how a treatment

affects the human body and to make sure it is safe and effective. There are several types of clinical trials currently underway at CINJ, including those that diagnose, treat, prevent, and manage symptoms of cancer. Many treatments used today, whether drugs or vaccines; ways to do surgery or give radiation therapy; or combinations of treatments, are the results of past clinical trials.

As New Jersey's only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, CINJ offers patients access to treatment options not available at other institutions within the state. CINJ currently enrolls more than 1,000 patients on clinical trials, including approximately 15 percent of all new adult cancer patients and approximately 70 percent of all pediatric cancer patients. Enrollment in these studies nationwide is fewer than five percent of all adult cancer patients.

About The Cancer Institute of New Jersey

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey (www.cinj.org) is the state's first and only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, and is dedicated to improving the prevention, detection, treatment and care of patients with cancer. CINJ's physician-scientists engage in translational research, transforming their laboratory discoveries into clinical practice, quite literally bringing research to life. The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is a center of excellence of UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. To support CINJ, please call the Cancer Institute of New Jersey Foundation at 1-888-333-CINJ.

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey Network is comprised of hospitals throughout the state and provides a mechanism to rapidly disseminate important discoveries into the community. Flagship Hospital: Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital. Major Clinical Research Affiliate Hospitals: Carol G. Simon Cancer Center at Morristown Memorial Hospital, Carol G. Simon Cancer Center at Overlook Hospital, and Jersey Shore University Medical Center. Affiliate Hospitals: Bayshore Community Hospital, CentraState Healthcare System, Cooper University Hospital*, JFK Medical Center, Raritan Bay Medical Center, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Hamilton (CINJ at Hamilton), Saint Peter's University Hospital, Somerset Medical Center, Southern Ocean County Hospital, The University Hospital/UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School*, and University Medical Center at Princeton. *Academic Affiliate

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