

Are You a Candidate for Cancer Genetic Counseling for Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer?

The genetic testing company that holds an exclusive patent on genetic testing for hereditary breast and ovarian cancer (BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes) has launched a marketing campaign to aggressively advertise this testing directly to consumers and encourage them to pursue testing. Please keep in mind that this is a marketing campaign designed to increase this company's revenue and consider the following:

These advertisements:

- fail to mention that the majority of breast cancer is not due to a hereditary cause.
- do not state that there are risk factors that can be used to determine which individuals may benefit from genetic counseling and testing.
- exaggerate and oversimplify the benefits and downplay the possible risks and complexities of this testing.
- have been described as inaccurate, misleading, and using scare tactics by several publications.
- imply that the test is a simple, straightforward, stand-alone tool for assessing risk and determining medical management and that it can be correctly ordered and interpreted by any provider.

The cancer genetic counseling and testing process (including which test to order and interpreting the results correctly) can be quite complex. It is not simply a positive or negative test result. Studies have shown a high rate of genetic test result misinterpretation among providers who do not specialize in this area. Furthermore, particularly in low-risk families, the risks (e.g. ambiguous test results, failure to obtain insurance payment for this expensive (~\$3000) test) of testing may outweigh the benefits; therefore, it is important to carefully weigh the risks and benefits of testing. If your personal and/or family history meets any of the following risk factors, you may wish to consider seeing a cancer genetic counselor for a personalized risk assessment and discussion of the risks and benefits of appropriate testing options.

Consider genetic counseling if you have a personal and/or family history of:

- Breast cancer diagnosed before age 45.
- Multiple cases of breast cancer on the same side of the family.
- Ovarian cancer in a family with breast cancer.
- Male breast cancer.
- Multiple cases of pancreatic cancer on the same side of the family.
- The combination of breast, ovarian, and/or pancreatic cancer on the same side of the family or in a single individual.
- Jewish ancestry in combination with any of the above.
- Jewish ancestry and even one case of breast or ovarian cancer (even in the absence of additional family history).
- Medullary breast cancer and triple negative breast cancer are over-represented in women with hereditary breast and ovarian cancer.

Learn more about cancer genetic counseling at www.yalecancercenter.org/genetics