Testing for Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Syndrome

High Risk Cancer Prevalent in Primary Care

Many studies have demonstrated that women at high risk for hereditary breast and/or ovarian cancer will benefit from management strategies designed for their specific level of risk. Individualized medical management is evolving to potentially decrease incidence, morbidity and mortality of these diseases. The following study examined the proportion of women who are at high-risk for hereditary breast/ovarian cancer in a single primary care practice.


Purpose:
To determine the prevalence of familial breast and ovarian cancer among unaffected patients in a primary care setting.

Design and Methods:
Questionnaires were mailed to 608 women in one primary care practice and 567 responded. 27 women (4.7%) with previously diagnosed breast or ovarian cancer were excluded from the analysis. There were three categories of breast/ovarian family history: “no family history,” “insignificant family history,” and “significant potentially high-risk family history”. The criteria used to identify high-risk women were those with no personal cancer history, but a family history of:

• > two relatives with breast and/or ovarian cancer; and/or
• a single relative with bilateral breast cancer or breast and ovarian cancer; and/or
• a single relative with breast and/or ovarian cancer <40 years at diagnosis

Results:
Fifty-one unaffected women (9.0%) with significant family histories were further evaluated and 32 were found to be at high enough risk to warrant genetic evaluation.

Bottom Line:
A significant number of women required additional evaluation for familial breast and ovarian cancer in this one primary care practice. Identification of these women is important so that appropriate medical management strategies can be instituted to reduce their cancer risks. While this study did not include previously affected individuals in the analysis, these women are also appropriate for risk assessment as they may have increased risks for second cancers.