



## Breast Cancer, Genetics and Genetic Counseling

Many breast cancer patients are concerned that they may have an inherited form of breast cancer that may affect other family members. Unaffected women may be concerned that because of a family history of breast cancer they may develop it.

### **How many women have a hereditary form of breast cancer?**

It is estimated that 5 – 10 percent of all breast cancer in women is caused by an inherited mutation predisposing them to a higher risk of developing breast cancer. This means that 90 – 95 percent of women with breast cancer do not have an inherited risk for the disease.

### **What are the characteristics of women and their families in whom there is a greater risk for an inherited predisposition to breast cancer?**

- Women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer before the age of 50, or before menopause.
- Women with one or more affected relatives, often over generations, at least one of whom was diagnosed with breast cancer before the age of 50.
- Women with cancer in both breasts, or with relatives who have had cancer in both breasts.
- Women with breast cancer who have a family history of ovarian cancer or certain other cancers.
- Women who themselves have both breast and ovarian cancer, or who have a family history of similarly affected individuals.
- Individuals with a family history of male breast cancer or men with a personal history of breast cancer.
- Women with a diagnosis of certain breast diseases, for example DCIS, LCIS, or ADH).

Having a family history of breast cancer does not mean that a woman has an inherited predisposition. If you do not have a family history of breast cancer, you may still have an inherited predisposition. And even if you do have one or more of the above characteristics, you may not have an inherited predisposition for breast cancer.

### **Risk Evaluation**

If you are concerned about a possible hereditary predisposition to breast cancer in yourself or your family, you may ask to be referred to our Risk Assessment Program. There you will see



a multidisciplinary team designed to evaluate all aspects of your risk for breast cancer. As part of that, you will be able to have genetic counseling.

### **Benefits of Genetic Counseling**

Genetic counseling is designed to provide each person with a risk assessment. Often people discover that their chance of being a carrier or developing breast cancer is lower than they expected. Anxiety may be decreased as a result. Knowing one's carrier status may influence one's medical care and may allow a known non-carrier to increase her or his surveillance by participating in clinical trials and choosing other treatment options.

### **Genetic Testing**

The decision to have genetic testing is a personal one. Before you make the decision to have testing, to decline it, or wait, you need to be educated. The genetic counselor can give you information that will help you decide. If you want to consider genetic testing at NYU Langone Medical Center, you must have genetic counseling in order to make a fully informed decision.

If you are interested in learning more about genetic counseling and testing, ask your doctor for a referral.