

## **Risky Business**

### **Newton-Wellesley Hospital Launches First-of-Its Kind Cancer Risk Assessment Program**

In the United States each year, approximately 14,000 women are diagnosed with breast or ovarian cancer that have a hereditary predisposition. Had these women been identified before they developed cancer, there is a significant chance that cancer could have been prevented, or identified at an earlier and more curable stage.

Newton-Wellesley and its Auerbach Breast Center and Women's Imaging Center launched a pilot program designed to identify women who may not be aware that they are at high risk for developing breast and ovarian cancer. According to Kevin Hughes, MD, of Newton-Wellesley Hospital's Auerbach Breast Center, the Breast and Ovarian Risk Assessment Program takes a new approach to solving this problem.

"There is currently no health care system in the world that has the ability to identify these women on a large-scale basis and, consequently, change their health care management in a way that will prevent cancer or detect it earlier," said Dr. Hughes. "Through specially designed computer software, Newton-Wellesley is pioneering the development and testing of such a system."

Once a patient has agreed to participate, her personal and family health history will be gathered and analyzed to determine if she is at risk. If a patient is then identified as high risk for breast and/or ovarian cancer, she will be informed of that risk and offered a consultation. One of the Breast Center's trained nurse practitioners will meet with the patient to discuss the genetic connection to breast cancer and which measures can be taken to reduce the risk, including increased monitoring, preventive medication and even preventive surgery. For some women, genetic testing may be an option.

After the pilot is launched at Newton-Wellesley, the computer software will be made available to hospitals throughout the United States, and eventually the world. Currently, six other hospitals locally and nationally are already waiting for the results of the pilot so that similar programs can be implemented.

"Newton-Wellesley's goal was to develop a comprehensive approach that will serve as a model for other health care organizations. This model may also be adapted for use in identifying and managing the care of people with a predisposition to other cancers that have been found to have a significant hereditary link," added Dr. Hughes.

The new Breast and Ovarian Cancer Risk Assessment Program is a collaborative effort between Newton-Wellesley Hospital's Auerbach Breast Center, Women's Imaging Center, primary care physicians, and Massachusetts General Hospital.

Since opening at Newton-Wellesley Hospital in 2003, the Auerbach Breast Center has treated thousands of women for a wide range of conditions, including mastitis, breast cysts, fibroadenomas and cancer. The staff provides a full spectrum of services, from screening and diagnosis to treatment and counseling. By having the entire multidisciplinary team under one roof, patients have easy access to all of their caregivers and superb coordination of care. The team includes surgeons, medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, plastic surgeons and genetic counselors. The Breast Center also works closely with the Women's Imaging Center, as well as pathology and surgical services to provide patients with a seamless experience.

Breast Center physicians have many years of training, specialty credentials and experience in breast care. Surgeons are highly skilled in the latest breast conservation and minimally invasive surgical techniques. Newton-Wellesley oncologists offer the most advanced chemotherapy treatments available, including emerging therapies through participation in national cancer trials. In case of cancer, the Breast Center's highly trained specialists will collaborate to create a treatment plan based on the needs of the patients and the latest methods and protocols.

For more information about the Breast and Ovarian Cancer Risk Assessment program, contact the Auerbach Breast Center at 617-243-5540.

As a community benefit program, Partners HealthCare works with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to provide free breast and cervical cancer screening for low income, uninsured women. For information call: 1-800-449-0344.