

PRESS RELEASE

Malaysian Study Shows One In Nine Ovarian Cancer Patients Inherited An Altered BRCA Gene

KUALA LUMPUR, [4 MAY 2016] – A Malaysian Study, published in the top women’s cancer scientific journal *Gynaecologic Oncology*, shows one in nine ovarian cancer patients inherited the *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* mutation, calling for greater awareness for genetic testing among ovarian cancer patients.

The findings of the first comprehensive Asian study published in the journal of *Gynaecologic Oncology* suggest for the first time that Asian women with epithelial ovarian cancer should be provided genetic counseling and considered for testing for germline alterations in *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*. It was previously thought that the frequency of mutations was much lower in ovarian cancer compared to breast cancer patients, and that only individuals with a relative affected by breast or ovarian cancer was at risk of being a carrier. The study showed that 1 in 9 ovarian cancer patients are carriers, and notably, 4 in 10 carriers did not have any family history of breast or ovarian cancer. This means that the current practice of offering genetic counseling and genetic testing only to women with a family history would mean that 1 in 3 *BRCA1* carriers and 1 in 2 *BRCA2* mutation carriers would not be offered the information that could help to prevent cancers.

Prior studies in Caucasian populations have shown that the 1 in 8 Caucasian women with epithelial ovarian cancer have germline alterations in *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* but it was thought that this higher prevalence was because of common mutations found only in the Caucasian population. This Malaysian study is the first study to show that the proportion of ovarian cancer patients with a genetic alteration in *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* is similar in Asian women and in Caucasian women. Each year, nearly 500 Malaysian women are diagnosed with invasive epithelial ovarian cancer but until now, few have had access to genetic counseling and genetic testing because it was thought that the mutations are rare and the test was too expensive.

"To me, finding out whether there is a genetic risk to ovarian cancer enables women to be empowered to make choices that could save their lives, particularly for ovarian cancer where there is currently no good screening method," said Professor Dr Teo Soo-Hwang, Head of the Breast and Ovarian Cancer Research Programme at Cancer Research Malaysia and Adjunct Professor at the University of Malaya and the study’s lead author.

"These data are so striking but what these results mean to the individual patient is unique to the patient and her circumstances. It’s never just a matter of offering a genetic test but this must, and I emphasize must go hand in hand with genetic counseling’ adds Professor Dr Woo Yin Ling, Consultant Gynae Oncologist at University Malaya.

Professor Teo added: "Although the *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* genes were discovered more than 20 years ago, few women in Malaysia have access to genetic counseling and genetic testing in part because of cost. In this study, we have also reported a new method that we have developed with the University of Melbourne where this test can now be offered for less than RM1, 500 compared to the current market price of more than RM5, 000 per patient".

This study is a collaborative effort by Cancer Research Malaysia, University Malaya and University of Melbourne, with funding from Ministry of Higher Education, Yayasan Sime Darby, PETRONAS and others.

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Notes to editor

Evaluation of germline *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* in an Asian cohort of ovarian cancer patients.

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About Cancer Research Malaysia

Cancer Research Malaysia (formerly known as Cancer Research Initiatives Foundation) is the first independent cancer research organisation in Malaysia. Cancer Research Malaysia conducts research to identify better ways to prevent, detect and cure cancer for Malaysians. Cancer Research Malaysia is committed to ensuring that at least 90% of funds received are spent on research. Cancer Research Malaysia researchers work closely with experts worldwide to fight cancers that occur in Asia as well as globally.

About University Malaya

University Malaya High Impact Research is funded under a special grant by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. Its aim is to conduct research that will lead to publications in top international journals which will help UM get into the top 100 QS World Ranked Universities by 2015. The Ovarian Cancer Research Programme is headed by Prof. Dr Woo Yin Ling and Assoc. Prof. Lim Boon Kiong and is part of the University Malaya Cancer Research Institute.

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