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Post-Mastectomy Radiation is Underutilized as a Treatment Method in Older Breast Cancer Patients

Study shows there could be a benefit for those at highest risk

San Antonio, Texas, December 18, 2006 – During a poster session this past weekend at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium, Dr. Bruce G. Haffty, Associate Director and Chair of Radiation Oncology at The Cancer Institute of New Jersey and UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, along with colleagues from other institutions presented data that shows post-mastectomy radiation therapy (PMRT), although associated with improved survival in high risk women, is relatively underutilized. The study is an updated analysis of a recent study published by the same group, with additional demographic data (Smith B, Haffty B et al. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, Vol 24, No 30, October 20, 2006: pp. 4901-4907).

Their study shows that although current clinical guidelines from the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology (ASTRO) and the American Society of Clinical Oncologists (ASCO) recommend adjuvant PMRT as standard treatment for patients of any age with high-risk breast cancer, only 55% of older women with high-risk breast cancer actually received PMRT in this population-based cohort. Thus, between 1998 through 2002, approximately 45% of older women with high-risk breast cancer did *not* receive a potentially life-saving and relatively nontoxic adjuvant therapy.

New Jersey also had a significantly lower utilization rate of post-mastectomy radiation therapy in high-risk women over age 70. In New Jersey, only 49% of this high-risk group of women, with larger tumors and/or four or more lymph nodes received post-mastectomy radiation between 1992-2002.

“These results bring to light our need to further examine the treatment methods we utilize for older breast cancer patients and the need for additional clinical trials focused on this cohort,” stated Dr. Haffty. “According to the National Cancer Institute’s Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results (SEER) data, Women age 70 years or older account for one third of breast cancer diagnoses and comprise a rapidly growing demographic. Nevertheless, older women have been substantially underrepresented in breast cancer clinical trials, and as a result treatment strategies for older women have been extrapolated from clinical trials conducted in younger women,” he continued.

Breast cancer widely affects women in the United States and New Jersey, with more than 213,000 women nationwide and 8,110 in New Jersey estimated to be diagnosed in 2006.

About CINJ

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is the state's first and only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, and is dedicated to improving the prevention, detection, treatment and care of patients with cancer. CINJ's physician-scientists engage in translational research, transforming their laboratory discoveries into clinical practice quite literally bringing research to life. The Cancer Institute of New Jersey is a Center of Excellence of UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. To support CINJ, please call 732/235-8614.

The Cancer Institute of New Jersey Network is comprised of hospitals throughout the state and provides a mechanism to rapidly disseminate important discoveries into the community. Partner Hospitals: Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, Atlantic Health System (Morristown Memorial Hospital, Mountainside Hospital, Overlook Hospital). Affiliate Hospitals: Bayshore Community Hospital, CentraState Healthcare System, Cooper University Hospital (CINJ at Cooper),* Jersey Shore University Medical Center, JFK Medical Center, Monmouth Medical Center, Raritan Bay Medical Center, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital at Hamilton (CINJ-Hamilton), Saint Peter's University Hospital, Somerset Medical Center, Southern Ocean County Hospital, The University Hospital/UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School,* and University Medical Center at Princeton.

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