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Phoenix company's test aids breast cancer fight

Recurrence forecast steers treatment

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A Phoenix biotech start-up is offering a new genetic test for women with breast cancer who are weighing whether they want to undergo chemotherapy or hormone therapy after surgery to treat their disease.

The Molecular Profiling Institute recently began selling the MammaPrint test after licensing it from a company in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The test analyzes 70 genes in a woman's tumor to determine the likelihood of a cancer recurring.

"It's definitely the new wave of applied research that is resulting in individualized profiles for the management of various cancers," said Dr. Dave Alberts, director of the Arizona Cancer Center.

"It's very exciting that we're finally getting research in the area of genomics applied on an individual patient basis."

Among the first patients to take advantage of the test was Julie Oppenheimer, 46, of Scottsdale. Diagnosed with breast cancer at 45, she underwent a double mastectomy but debated whether she needed chemotherapy.

After a piece of her tumor was analyzed with the MammaPrint test, she decided the risk of recurrence was so low that she could forgo chemotherapy after surgery.

"The way I came to the decision is that the benefit wouldn't outweigh the risk of chemotherapy," she said.

Her husband, Dr. Randy Oppenheimer, agreed. As chief of head and neck surgery at Maricopa Medical Center, he said the test gave the couple another piece of data on which to base their decision.

"The other factors were the tumor's early stage and no lymph nodes were involved,"

he said.

While the test may spare women from having chemotherapy, it also may prompt some to undergo the treatment based on their individualized genetic risk, said Dr. Robert Penny, president and chief executive officer of the Molecular Profiling Institute.

"We realize we can do better at predicting how a tumor will behave," he said. "Many of the tumors that we do treat don't need (chemo or hormone therapy) because they won't recur. But the opposite is true, too."

The test, which costs \$3,200, is expected to pay dividends for the Translational Genomics Research Institute and the International Genomics Consortium. Both are non-profit companies in Phoenix that have a financial stake in the Molecular Profiling Institute.

Penny said the company hopes to license similar diagnostic tests for other cancers, including prostate, colon and lymphoma.

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