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Breast Cancer Incidence Rate Decline Seen In San Francisco Bay Area Women Over 40

Latest data strengthens link between breast cancer decline and decreased use of hormone replacement therapy

FREMONT, CA – *October 1, 2007* - As recent reports have confirmed a substantial decline in breast cancer incidence rates in most parts of the US, research scientists at the Northern California Cancer Center have published a new report on how this change has affected women living in the San Francisco Bay Area (SFBA), where breast cancer rates have long been among the highest in the world. The study, published today in the journal *Breast Cancer Research*, found a 3.6% per year decrease in invasive breast cancer in non-Hispanic white women in the SFBA aged 40 years and older during 1999-2004. In other regions of California the decline was 4.4% per year from 2001 to 2004. Mortality rates declined 2.2% per year from 1988 to 2004 in the SFBA and the rest of California.

“Even considering recent drops in breast cancer, invasive breast cancer rates in the Bay Area were 4.2% higher than in similar women in the rest of California. These higher rates are consistent with higher distributions of established breast cancer risk factors including never having children, late age at first birth and alcohol consumption” notes Dr. Theresa Keegan, Ph.D., the Northern California Cancer Center scientist who led the study. Decreases in invasive incident rates were evident in most women, except women

under 40 years of age and women with distant stage of disease at diagnosis in the rest of California.

Prior studies have suggested that geographic variation in US breast cancer incidence relates to differences in established risk factors. These include: older age, white ethnicity, US born, late age at first birth, moderate to high consumption of alcohol, late age at menopause, and use of hormone therapy. Many of these risk factors correlate with higher levels of education, income and other socioeconomic status, which census data confirm to be more concentrated among SFBA residents.

The most notable risk factor changes observed from 2001 to 2003 were the 76% and 72% relative decreases in the percentages of women using combined estrogen and progestin hormone therapy in the SFBA and the rest of California. These decreases in hormone replacement therapy are comparable to those noted in an earlier NCCC report of a 68% decrease in the use of HT among Northern California Kaiser Permanente patients.

"These findings are further evidence that trends in breast cancer track closely to trends in hormone therapy use in the population: rates were high where use was high, and rates dropped sharply where use dropped sharply. I think everyone is surprised to see how this relation has played itself out in the larger population" notes Dr. Tina Clarke, Ph.D., senior author of the study.

Breast cancer data was obtained from the California Cancer Registry for the period January 1988 through December 31, 2004 and risk factor data was obtained from the 2001 and 2003 California Health Interview Surveys and four population-based studies conducted in the SFBA between 1990 and 2000. The researchers analyzed data from a population of 5,806,325 women in the SFBA and over 26 million women in the state of California.

The study was funded by the National Cancer Institute, the National Institutes of Health, the Public Health Institute and Plumpjack LINK fund. Keegan's co-authors include Ellen

Chang, Sc.D, Esther M. John, Ph.D., Pamela L. Horn-Ross, Ph.D., Margaret R. Wrench, Ph.D., Sally L. Glaser, Ph.D. and Christina A. Clarke, Ph.D.

The study “Recent changes in breast cancer incidence and risk factor prevalence in San Francisco Bay Area and California women: 1988-2004” can be viewed online at

<http://breast-cancer-research.com/currentissue/browse.asp>

About the Northern California Cancer Center

Founded in 1974 by the deans of the medical schools at University of California, San Francisco, Stanford University and by the president of the California division of the American Cancer Society, NCCC is a nationally recognized leader in understanding who gets cancer and why, and how to improve the quality of life for individuals living with cancer. NCCC’s new website builds on its rich history of research and extensive network of collaborations to provide a one-stop shop of vital resources for cancer prevention and information.