



Breast Cancer

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is Breast Cancer?

Normally, cells grow and replace themselves in an orderly fashion. Breast cancer cells behave differently, often multiplying more rapidly and living longer than surrounding cells. They can form into clusters, or tumors that can be seen on x-ray (mammogram) or felt on examination.

The mammogram looks suspicious – what next?

Often the physician will need to examine the suspicious area and a biopsy is done. A biopsy is the removal of all or part of the area for study under a microscope. This can be done using a special needle, or through an incision. The physician will discuss the advantages of each method and will base recommendations on the nature of the lump. Once removed the tissue is specially prepared and studies by a pathologist. It takes about 72 hours for the pathologist to make a final report. If no cancer cells are found the report will indicate that the lump is benign. The physician may then suggest monthly breast self-examination, periodic mammograms and examinations by a physician.

What is the biopsy report states cancer?

Based on the type of cancer, the physician will suggest different options. There are several types of surgery, which may be considered. A lumpectomy is done if the tumor is relatively small, is confined to one area and involves removal of no more than 25% of the total breast. Often radiation therapy is prescribed following this surgery. A mastectomy is the other surgical option. All visible breast tissue is removed but the muscles and nerves are preserved. Reconstruction of the breast may be performed at the same time, later or never. In either type of surgery, removal and pathological examination of lymph nodes under the arm may be performed. A final report is generated with information about the tumor. This information is used to make further treatment decisions.

What are further treatment options?

An oncologist (physician who treats cancer with chemotherapy) and a radiation oncologist (physician who treats cancer with radiation) may be part of the consultation team. Depending upon the results of the surgery and based on the pathology reports, it may be recommended that chemotherapy and/or radiation treatment be implemented to manage the cancer. The patient, family physicians and oncology team work together to determine a plan of care that is best for the patient situation.

The members of the Breast Center Team at Greenwich Hospital include a Cancer Counselor, Senior Radiology Technician and a Nurse Coordinator who are specially trained and experienced to assist patient and families.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheet, see the Greenwich Hospital website at www.greenwichhospital.org and click on Patient Services, then Patient Education.