



Oklahoma-based cancer test helps stop a killer

The Edmond Sun

Oklahoma City— OKLAHOMA CITY — It took 14 years for Oklahoma City biotechnology company InterGenetics to research and develop its breast cancer risk assessment test, OncoVue. But less than a year after becoming commercially available, the test already has begun paying dividends to patients.

Available at Breast Imaging of Oklahoma, in Edmond, OncoVue combines a genetic-based cancer risk test with a personal patient history to find a woman's present and future risk of developing breast cancer.

A California oncologist reports that the test, which has its origins in research conducted at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation, played a crucial role in discovering a tumor in one of his patients. Due to confidentiality rules, the patient's name cannot be disclosed.

Phillip Bretz, director of the Desert Breast and Osteoporosis Institute in Rancho Mirage, Calif., said if it wasn't for OncoVue, his patient's breast cancer might have gone undetected.

"She had a mammogram in June of 2007, but nothing showed up. She came to see me in September, because she'd heard about OncoVue," he said. "The test said she was at a high risk for breast cancer. When I used the infrared, it said there was a problem in the right breast in the upper-outer quadrant."

With a biopsy, doctors located calcium deposits, but no cancer. Still, the risk assessment and the infrared concerned Bretz, so he continued to assess his patient. Soon after, he located the cancer, which surgeons subsequently removed.

"It had me jumping for joy — not that she had cancer, but that the technology worked," Bretz said. "Nothing showed up on the mammogram in June. If she had gone to another facility, one without OncoVue or the infrared, doctors might have stopped at finding the calcium deposits. It could have been another year before they found the cancer."

A year can be a lifetime for a malignant tumor. The potential to spread is dangerous and potentially deadly, Bretz said, making early detection and removal crucial.

"The more I use OncoVue with the infrared, the more I know we're really onto something," he said. "If we can pick up these smaller cancers consistently like that, eventually breast cancer becomes like a common cold."

Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation scientist Linda Thompson, whose research helped develop OncoVue, said she's glad to hear doctors are using it in innovative ways.

"Certainly one of the most exciting aspects of the OncoVue test is that it would identify women for whom the standard screening mammogram is not enough to manage their breast health," said Thompson, who holds the Putnam City Schools Distinguished Chair in Cancer Research at OMRF. "It's wonderful to hear this test is helping patients, and I hope there will be many more stories like this."

Craig Shimasaki, president and CEO of InterGenetics, said this story underscores the greater purpose of InterGenetics. "The mission of the company is to effect change in the lives of millions of women — to do something proactive, instead of reactive in the detection and prevention of breast cancer."

OncoVue is the first genetic-based breast cancer risk test that incorporates both gene-based information and personal history measures to determine a woman's future risk of developing breast cancer. The test, which relies on a medical questionnaire and DNA samples obtained by swishing mouthwash, is currently available in 14 states, including Oklahoma.

InterGenetics also is developing similar risk assessment tests for ovarian and colon cancer.

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