



Times-Standard

Study could play significant role in eradication of breast cancer

Jessie Faulkner/The Times-Standard

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ARCATA -- Well-known breast cancer expert and author Dr. Susan Love and local surgeon Dr. Ellen Mahoney will provide details of a local grant-funded research study, that they hope could lead to the ultimate eradication of breast cancer, at an educational forum Thursday at Humboldt State University.

Much of the \$850,000 grant from the California Breast Cancer Research Program -- administered through the Dr. Susan Love Educational Foundation -- will be spent in Humboldt County on the study that will test the effectiveness of administering a minuscule amount of chemotherapy into the breast via the milk ducts.

Ultimately, depending upon the study results, the duct-administered chemotherapy medicine could be used to eliminate the cells lining the ducts -- the location where breast cancer develops.

In 2005, Mahoney said Thursday, a North Coast woman diagnosed with ductal carcinoma-in-situ used the treatment with no adverse side effects.

Nobody knew at the time, Mahoney said, what the effects would be of administering the chemotherapy directly into the milk ducts.

"We weren't sure what was going to happen that day," Mahoney said. "The hope and belief was it would stay in the duct with no side effects. We

weren't sure as it has never been done on a person."

Love drew blood in intervals two days after the procedure and forwarded the samples to John Hopkins University for testing. The chemotherapy drug had not entered the patient's blood system.

"That gave us a lot of encouragement," Mahoney said.

Traditional treatment typically involves a lumpectomy. And ductal carcinoma-in-situ is a pre-cancer condition for some, but never develops into cancer in others. Because of that possible development into cancer, the traditional treatment has been surgical, predominantly lumpectomy -- the localized removal of affected tissue, the physician said.

Key to the study is the relatively recent understanding that the six to nine milk ducts within the breast are completely separate, Mahoney said.

The new study will continue that exploration of the non-surgical treatments with 30 patients with ductal carcinoma-in-situ -- all or most local, Mahoney said. The tested treatment is revolutionary in that it not only could eliminate surgical treatment of breast cancer but could also -- if successful -- establishes a preventive measure to totally eradicate the cells lining the milk ducts, components necessary to get breast cancer.

Those enrolled in the study will first have an MRI taken of the affected breast, Mahoney and Love will meet with the patient and extract a tiny amount of fluid out of the affected duct to determine the presence of proteins in the fluid that indicate cancer, then administer a tiny amount of the chemotherapy medicine in a time-release fatty capsule. They'll then wait six weeks, repeat the MRI and then schedule a surgery by the patient's

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surgeon of choice. Mahoney and Love will be in the operating room to retrieve the affected tissue for further study.

The study's grant will cover all costs of the involved medical treatment with the exception of the surgery, Mahoney said.

If the 30 local women do well, Mahoney said, a bigger study will be done nationwide.

"Our goal is the ultimate eradication of breast cancer," she said. "This work in Humboldt County is part of that overall project."

Thursday's forum will include a question and answer session and discussion of breast cancer treatment and screening.

Tickets are available at the door and at Lima's Pharmacy in Eureka and McKinleyville; Green's Pharmacy in Fortuna; Mahoney's office, Arcata; the Humboldt Community Breast Health Project and at the door.

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If You Go

What: "Breast Cancer 2008 and Beyond" forum

When: Thursday, 7-9 p.m.

Where: HSU Van Duzer Theatre

Admission: \$25

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