



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Good News about Breast Cancer

Recent Decline in Breast Cancer Incidence Rates in the United States, 1999–2003

Recorded: June 5, 2007; posted: September 7, 2007

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Ana Benson] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm Ana Benson, filling in for your host, Matthew Reynolds.

A diagnosis of breast cancer can be pretty frightening news for anyone. Many women know someone who has had breast cancer and may also have a friend or relative who has died as a result of breast cancer. Today, I'm going to be talking with Dr. Sherri Stewart about a study she and her CDC colleagues recently completed. Dr. Stewart is with CDC's Division of Cancer Prevention. In this study, Dr. Stewart examines rates of breast cancer diagnoses among women in the United States from 1999 to 2003. Welcome to the show, Dr. Stewart.

[Dr. Stewart] Thank you, Ana. It's a pleasure to be here.

[Ana Benson] Dr. Stewart, your report comes at time when breast cancer has been in the news. When Elizabeth Edwards, wife of presidential candidate John Edwards, recently announced that her breast cancer had returned, that put a very real face on this diagnosis for many of us and provided a window into how this can affect the whole family. What did your study tell you about the number of women affected by breast cancer?

[Dr. Stewart] Well, in our study, we looked at more than a million cases of breast cancer. These included different types of breast cancer, like invasive breast cancer. This is where cancer cells have spread to other parts of the body. We also looked at in situ breast cancer where cancer cells have not spread to nearby tissues or other parts of the body. Some of the highlights of what we found were that rates of invasive breast cancer have dropped every year from 1999 to 2003. The largest decrease was from 2002 to 2003 when we found a 6% decrease in the rates of invasive breast cancer. This decrease was seen in all women over fifty and women from sixty to sixty-nine had the largest decrease. During the same time, we found a significant decrease of in situ cancers among women from fifty to eighty years old. We also found a decrease in localized or early stage breast cancer. However, we did not see a significant decrease in late stage breast cancer.

[Ana Benson] Interesting. Now, did you find the same decreases in breast cancer across various ethnic and racial groups?

[Dr. Stewart] Yes, we found similar decreases. From 2002 to 2003, invasive breast cancer rates dropped among white, black, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic women. And actually, white women and Asian/Pacific Islander women had the largest decreases in invasive breast cancer rates. For American Indian or Alaska Native women, the invasive breast cancer rates remained about the same as in the past.

[Ana Benson] Now, the information you collected came from forty-one states in the U.S. Did you find differences in breast cancer rates in specific states or regions of the U.S.?

[Dr. Stewart] Yes we did. We saw significant decreases in breast cancer rates in 24 of the 41 states included. We did not see increases in breast cancer rates in any particular state and we also did not find any clear geographic patterns among the states' rates of breast cancer

[Ana Benson] With your study revealing lower rates of breast cancer, I imagine you and your colleagues gave some thought to possible explanations for these decreases. Tell me, were you able to identify reasons why the rates of breast cancer were falling?

[Dr. Stewart] Well, Ana, it's difficult to be certain, but we do have some ideas about why we're seeing a drop in breast cancer rates. Other studies in recent years have shown that hormone replacement therapy causes an increased risk of breast cancer. The findings from these other studies led many doctors to tell women to stop using hormone replacement therapy because of this increased risk. Also, the number of women being screened for breast cancer through mammograms has an impact on the breast cancer rates. Recent studies have shown that about 1.1 million fewer women were being screened for breast cancer in recent years. And so we think, therefore, that maybe drops in breast cancer rates may be related to fewer women being treated with hormone replacement therapy, or fewer women being screened for breast cancer, or actually a combination of both factors.

[Ana Benson] Now, I'm sure there are a lot of people, women especially, who find these studies really encouraging. Tell me, what will CDC be doing going forward?

[Dr. Stewart] Well, CDC will continue to study the rates of breast cancer, in part through our National Program of Cancer Registries. And we'll also continue to evaluate the number of women who are going for screening mammograms. We're actually in the planning process for a public awareness program to raise awareness and increase the number of women being screened. In order to continue to reduce breast cancer mortality, CDC also provides low income women with access to mammograms through a program called the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. For more information on this program, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/ for a link. This program helps ensure access to timely, high quality breast cancer screening and diagnostic services, and it increases the likelihood of the earliest possible breast cancer diagnoses.

[Ana Benson] Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today, Dr. Stewart.

[Dr. Stewart] Thanks very much for inviting me, Ana.

[Ana Benson] That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Ana Benson for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family and your community, please visit www.cdc.gov.