

MRI of the Contralateral Breast (ACRIN 6667)

ACRIN Study Confirms MRI Detects Cancers in the Opposite Breast of Women Newly Diagnosed with Breast Cancer

A diagnosis of breast cancer is upsetting news for any woman. In addition to facing the difficulties of treatment, many women may worry about being diagnosed with cancer again in the future. In fact, women who are diagnosed with breast cancer in one breast are at risk of having cancer in the opposite breast and not having it detected until after the first cancer has been treated. Over time, up to 10 percent of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer in one breast will also be diagnosed later with cancer in the opposite breast.

A new study from the American College of Radiology Imaging Network (ACRIN), a cooperative group sponsored and funded by the National Cancer Institute, offers hope for a more thorough breast cancer diagnosis for potential new cancers in the opposite breast. Researchers discovered that adding magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to the usual exams and tests given to women with newly diagnosed cancer in one breast greatly improved doctors' ability to accurately diagnose the full extent of a patient's breast cancer in the opposite breast that might otherwise have been missed. Based on the study results, researchers recommend that women diagnosed with breast cancer should consider having an MRI of the opposite breast before treatment is planned.

The ACRIN study, which included 25 sites across North America and one in Germany, was led by Constance Lehman, M.D., Ph.D., professor of radiology and director of breast imaging at the University of Washington and Seattle Cancer Care Alliance. Over a thousand women with a recent diagnosis of cancer in one breast [28 women at the Elizabeth Wende Breast Clinic over a 1 ½ month period] were enrolled and given a breast MRI scan in addition to the standard clinical workup. Thirty women enrolled in the study who were diagnosed with cancer in one breast, and determined by mammography and clinical breast exam to be cancer-free in the opposite breast, then had cancer in the opposite breast diagnosed by MRI.

Dr. Lehman says, "Instead of those women having another cancer diagnosis two, five, or ten years after their initial treatment, we can diagnose and treat those opposite breast cancers at the same time."

The MRI found a variety breast cancers. In general, those cancers were at an earlier stage than those found by other types of exams, which is positive news. Doctors want to find these cancers before they become invasive and spread to other parts of the body. In this study, 60 percent of the cancers were invasive, and 40 percent were *ductal carcinoma in situ* (DCIS)—an early form of cancer that has not affected surrounding tissue. None of the cancers discovered in the study had spread to the lymph nodes.

Researchers hope that breast MRI can improve a woman's quality of life, both at the time of her initial diagnosis, and in the years following. An MRI of the opposite breast can provide women

and their doctors with important information about whether there is cancer in that breast, which can lead to more effective treatment and increased peace of mind.

Thanks to an MRI, ACRIN study participant Vianne Kenny found out the extent of her breast cancer. She says, “I am fortunate to have participated in the study because the MRI provided information about my cancer that wasn’t found by other tests.” Researchers hope that in the future, patients such as Kenny will receive the fullest information possible about the extent of their disease.