

Tracking breast cancer over decades to save lives

September 30 2011, By Elizabeth Fernandez

A new way to study and treat breast cancer being launched at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) in October will screen women for the disease and provide them with individual assessments of their risk of developing the cancer.

Called the Athena Breast Health Network, the project is a collaboration among the five University of California medical campuses through which some 150,000 women throughout California will be screened for breast cancer and tracked for decades. The project will test and compare new methods of researching and delivering breast health care for women.

“The mission of Athena is to save lives,” said Laura Esserman, MD, MBA, who founded Athena and is the director of the Carol Franc Buck Breast Care Center at the UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center.

The individual assessments will be done down the road, with those at highest risk connected to a breast health specialist at UCSF to discuss their family history and ways to reduce their risks.

The project, intended to improve survival, reduce suffering and accelerate research, is expected to create a rich trove of data and knowledge that will shape [breast cancer](#) care just as the renowned Framingham heart study changed the care of patients with heart disease.

Athena will provide women with a comprehensive network for breast health, including individual and personalized tools and information.

“We know that women’s histories – their personal and medical histories – hold the cure,” Esserman said. “By bringing together patients, physicians, clinicians and researchers to work together, Athena will improve and personalize care today, and deliver even better care tomorrow.”

Esserman, a surgeon, is a leader in personalized medicine who is spearheading a groundbreaking national trial to rapidly screen promising new medications and match them to specific biomarkers. Called I-SPY 2, the trial involves approximately 800 women with high-risk, fast-growing breast cancers. It will dramatically shorten the time it takes to deliver the right medication to the right patient.

I-SPY 2 is being conducted in conjunction with the National Cancer Institute, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and nearly two dozen major cancer research centers across the country. UCSF is the lead site on the trial.

Provided by University of California, San Francisco

Citation: Tracking breast cancer over decades to save lives (2011, September 30) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-09-tracking-breast-cancer-decades.html>

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