

Underactive Thyroid Linked to Lowered Breast Cancer Risk

Researchers at The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center have found that women with a common thyroid gland disorder appear to have a reduced chance of developing invasive breast cancer, reveals a study published in the online Feb. 14 edition of the journal *Cancer*. The print version will be released March 15.

The study found that women with primary hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid) had a 61 percent lower risk of developing invasive breast cancer. Additionally, the breast cancer patients in the study who also had a history of hypothyroidism had a less-aggressive variety of the disease that was sensitive to estrogen treatment.

"These intriguing and very exciting findings suggest a biological role of thyroid hormone in women with breast cancer that could offer some prognostic or therapeutic value, perhaps suggesting novel preventive strategies," said Massimo Cristofanilli, M.D., associate professor in M.D. Anderson's department of breast medical oncology and the study's lead author. "The study also draws attention to the role of thyroid

hormone and its potential interaction with estrogen to promote the onset of breast cancer. We need to consider that in the past we've looked only at the role of estrogen on breast tissue to promote the onset of cancer ... many more studies need to be done to explore the role of other hormones."

The influence of thyroid gland disease on breast cancer has been debated for some time. Other smaller studies have focused on a population of women with several thyroid conditions, such as hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid), thyroid cancer and others, and reported conflicting results on the incidence of breast cancer.

Consequently, researchers were not sure what to make of the different findings, Cristofanilli said.

M.D. Anderson's study is the first clinical investigation to examine the characteristics of invasive breast cancer in patients with hypothyroidism and compare the incidence of this common condition with a carefully selected matched control group.

Even before this research is concluded, Cristofanilli believes that, as

a first step, all women diagnosed with breast cancer should have their thyroid function tested so that

women with both hypo- and hyperthyroidism can be closely monitored. ■

Course Explores Balance Between Alternative and Western Medicine

A continuing-education series of classes now underway is exploring how complementary and integrative medicine can be mainstreamed into traditional medical education. The 11-week program, sponsored by the Rice University School of Continuing Education, is taught Monday evenings, 7 to 8:30 p.m., now through May 9. The course takes place on the Rice campus.

Course co-sponsors are The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Asia Society Texas, Rice University's Department of Religious Studies, Rice University's Asian Studies Program, and the Liginch Texas Institute.

The class fee is \$176 for regular

students and \$166 for students at co-sponsoring organizations. Students with current University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston identification pay only \$88. Continuing Nursing Education credits are pending.

Topics include "Eastern Therapeutic Models: Philosophy, Systems, and Practices," "Mind-Body Therapies: Meditation, Prayer, Mental Healing, and Art Therapy," "Manual Therapies: Chiropractic and Osteopathic Manipulation and Massage," and "Responsibilities of Patients and Practitioners."

For more information, e-mail scs@rice.edu or contact the Rice University School of Continuing Studies at (713) 348-4803. ■



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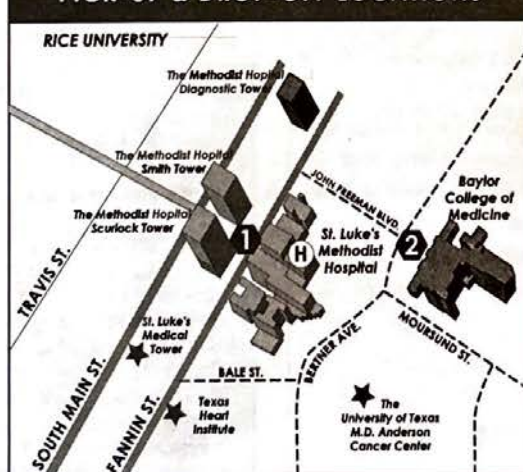
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