Are Hypothyroidism and Breast Cancer Linked?

BY FRAN LOWRY
Orlando Bureau

Hypothyroid postmenopausal women appear to be at significantly higher risk of developing breast cancer, Argentinian researchers reported in a poster presentation at the annual meeting of the North American Menopause Society.

In the prospective study, Dr. Maria Franchina and her colleagues of the Preventive Medical Center in Buenos Aires found a high incidence of breast cancer among postmenopausal women who were newly diagnosed with autoimmune hypothyroidism or whose hypothyroidism was poorly controlled because they had stopped taking their thyroid medication.

Among a total of 180 hypothyroid women attending their clinic between January 2006 and June 2007, 33 (18%) had breast cancer, compared with 5% (177 of 3,300 euthyroid women, the investigators reported.

The median age of the women was 52.9 years, and all were within 1 year of their last menstrual period.

There could well be an association between the two phenomena, but such a finding is controversial.

DR. FRANCHINA

"Growing breasts require several hormones, such as prolactin, estrogen, progesterone, adrenal steroids, insulin, growth hormone, and thy-roid hormones, so there could well be an association between low thyroid hormone and breast cancer," she said in a telephone interview. "But it is unclear whether breast cancer is common in women with breast cancer, and others reporting just the opposite."

In truth, whether thyroid autoimmune diseases actually increase a woman's risk for developing cancer is still not known, Dr. Franchina concluded.

The study generated a lot of interest among North American Menopause Society delegates, her colleagues noted.

She and her associates are planning a correlative study to further investigate this finding.

Medical and Surgical Abortions Are Equally Safe for Future Pregnancy

BY MICHELE G. SULLIVAN
Mid Atlantic Bureau

Medically induced abortions were just as safe as surgical abortions with regard to the outcomes of future pregnancies, according to a large study conducted in Denmark.

The population-based study of almost 12,000 pregnancies that occurred subsequent to elective abortions in the first trimester showed no significant differences in the risk of ectopic pregnancy, preterm birth, miscarriage, or low birth weight, reported study authors Dr. Jun Zhang, of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and colleagues (N. Engl. J. Med. 2007;357:648-53).

The incidence of ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, preterm birth (defined as gestation less than 37 completed weeks), and low birth weight (defined as less than 2,500 g) was not significantly different between the groups, even after the investigators adjusted for maternal age, parity, interpregnancy interval, maternal residence, cohabitation status, and gestational age at the time of the abortion. (See accompanying graphic.)

The findings differ from those of a previous study, which showed a significant association between medical abortion and ectopic pregnancy compared with surgical abortion (Am. J. Epidemiol. 2003;157:185-94).

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She and her associates are planning a correlative study to further investigate this finding.

Vitrification Superior to Slow Freeze in Two Studies

BY HEIDI SPLETE
Senior Writer

WASHINGTON — Increased pregnancy rates and oocyte survival rates support the superiority of vitrification over the traditional slow-freeze cryopreservation technique, based on the results from several studies presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine.

In vitrification, blastocysts are immersed in a medium and then quickly frozen using liquid nitrogen. The debate over which method of cryopreservation yields the best clinical results continues, but emerging data from studies of vitrification appear to favor the fast-freezing method.

Early outcomes data from one study of 41 women showed that blastocyst vitrification yielded significantly more pregnancies than embryos that had been slow frozen. In this study, Alicia L. Clifford and her colleagues at the Center for Reproductive Biology of Indiana in Indianapolis compared pregnancy rates from 30 patients who received embryos from slow-frozen eggs with 11 patients who received embryos from vitrified eggs.

Overall, 4 of 10 women in the vitrification group (40%) had positive fetal cardiac activity at 6 weeks, compared with 4 of 29 women (14%) in the slow-freeze group.

Cryopreservation of immature oocytes by any method has clinical application potential for women at risk of losing ovarian function for any reason and for women who simply wish to preserve their fertility, but larger outcome studies are needed to confirm the most effective techniques.

None of the authors of either study had any financial conflicts to disclose.