



WOMEN'S HEALTH

The Importance of Understanding Breast Cancer

(NAPSA)—At the age of 35, Dr. Maria Sepe, a family practitioner, was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer. As a member of the medical community, Dr. Sepe realized the importance of understanding the specifics about her cancer in order to make the most informed decisions about treatment. She insisted on having detailed testing done on the breast cancer that was now invading her body.

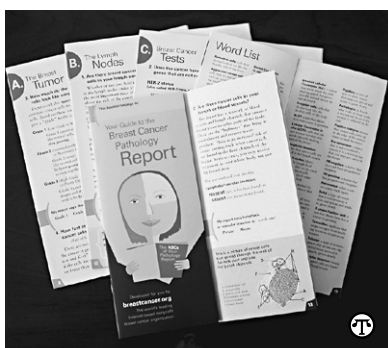
Through her tumor testing, Dr. Sepe learned that she had an aggressive type of cancer called HER2 (human epidermal growth factor receptor2) positive metastatic breast cancer, an especially aggressive form of the disease that affects approximately one-fourth of women with breast cancer. Specific testing is required to identify women who are HER2 positive.

"By examining the actual genetic makeup of the disease, which in my case is HER2 positive breast cancer, we learned what was causing the cancer so we could better treat it," explained Dr. Sepe. "Through specific tests we determined that the genetic makeup of my breast cancer may make me a candidate for a targeted treatment called Herceptin® (Trastuzumab). As with all cancer treatments, the therapy needs to be tailored to the individual patient." Patients should consult with a physician to determine if Herceptin therapy is appropriate for them.

Cancer develops when cells in the body begin to grow out of control. Normal cells grow, divide, and die. Instead of dying, cancer cells continue to grow and form new abnormal cells. Cancer cells grow together and are known as tumors.

Even when tumors are classified as similar based on either their appearance or where the cancer cells originated, they can act differently because of different genetic makeup. Only recently have researchers begun to use this knowledge to understand how a disease may progress—for example, the likelihood that a tumor will grow, spread or recur. This is an important new area of research and the foundation of many potential new treatments.

One of the most important tools used to understand the makeup of tumors is a pathology report. This report is generated each time tissue is removed from the body and is based on testing done to determine if the tissue is cancerous (malignant) or not cancerous (benign). The report analyzes the tissue to understand the



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genetic makeup and physical characteristics of the tumor, and to help determine the best treatment options.

Since these reports are prepared for doctors, they can be difficult for patients to understand. However, as patients become more involved in understanding their disease and often actively work with their physician to make treatment decisions, resources have been created to help patients decode pathology reports.

"Breast cancer can be a complicated disease and all patients should have the help they need to fully understand their diagnosis," said Dr. Marisa Weiss, founder of breastcancer.org, an Internet-based nonprofit organization created by a team of top-notch medical experts. The organization's Web site, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, provides in-depth medical, personal and practical information about breast cancer.

breastcancer.org recently developed a comprehensive booklet with the help of an unrestricted educational grant from Genentech, Inc. called, "*Your Guide to the Breast Cancer Pathology Report*," which is a step-by-step guide to help interpret these reports. This unique booklet is now available to help patients and their families understand the complicated and intimidating medical terms so they can be more actively involved in treatment decisions.

"Now that I am a patient myself, I share my story to increase awareness among cancer patients so they can learn about the resources that are available to them," stated Dr. Sepe. "This booklet enables people affected by breast cancer to better understand their disease and the treatment options that are most appropriate for their individual situation."

To access the booklet online go to www.breastcancer.org. To request a hard copy of this booklet send an e-mail to info@breastcancer.org.