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The Medical Library Association

has designed this pamphlet to help you decipher some common breast cancer-related “medspeak” terms. You’ll also find some tips on how to identify quality health care information on the Internet.

This resource was developed in conjunction with MLA’s Cancer Librarians Section, MLA members who work in cancer libraries and promote the continued development of cancer information resources and services.

Deciphering Breast Cancer Medspeak

A **ABSCCESS** – a collection of pus in the body that forms to combat infection-causing germs

AREOLA – the darker tissue surrounding the nipple

ASPIRATION – the use of a syringe or a needle to remove fluid from a lump or cyst

ATYPICAL LOBULAR HYPERPLASIA

(ALH) – ALH is a condition in which abnormal cells grow inside the milk-making glands of the breast. ALH is not considered a cancer, but it is sometimes associated with an increased risk of developing breast cancer.

AVERAGE RISK (for breast cancer) – the chances of getting breast cancer for someone who does not present specific risk factors related to the disease

B **BENIGN** – noncancerous

BENIGN BREAST CHANGES – noncancerous changes in the breast that can cause pain or lumpiness, but are not life-threatening. Some benign conditions, such as fibrocystic disease and breast inflammation are linked with an increased risk of developing breast cancer.

BIOPSY – removal of a small amount of body tissue for examination under a microscope and diagnosis

BRCA1 and BRCA2 GENES – genes that are associated with the development of breast cancer

BREAST DENSITY – describes the amount of different tissues in the breast. A dense breast (fairly common in young women) has less fatty tissue. Mammogram films of breasts with high density are sometimes difficult to read and interpret so your doctor may recommend an ultrasound.

BREAST IMPLANTS – sacs that are placed within the breast and filled with a substance such as saline or silicone and used for breast reconstruction after a mastectomy.

BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION (BSE) – an inspection by a woman of her breasts. Women should be aware of how their breasts normally feel and report any new breast change to a health professional as soon as they are found. For more information, call 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit <http://www.cancer.org>.

C **CALCIFICATIONS (also called microcalcifications)** – small amounts of calcium that build up in the tissues of the breast and can be seen only on mammograms. They can sometimes indicate the presence of an early breast cancer.

CANCER – a malignant tumor

CARCIN – when used as part of a word, means cancer, e.g. carcinogen, a substance known to cause cancer

CARCINOMA – another name for cancer

CARCINOMA IN SITU – Cancer that has not yet spread into surrounding tissues

CHEMOPREVENTION – the use of drugs or vitamins to prevent cancer in someone who is at risk of developing cancer or to prevent cancer from recurring in someone who has already been treated for the disease.

CLINICAL BREAST EXAM – a physical examination of the breast, underarm and collarbone area, performed by a health care provider to check for lumps

COMPUTED TOMOGRAPHY (CT)

SCANNING – computerized x-rays that allow cross-sections (slices) of the body to be viewed

COMPUTER-AIDED DETECTION (CAD) – the use of special computer programs that work like a second pair of eyes, reviewing a patient's mammogram film after the radiologist has already made an initial interpretation.

CORE NEEDLE BIOPSY – the use of a small needle to remove tissue for microscopic examination

CYCLIC BREAST CHANGES – normal tissue changes that occur in the breast during the menstrual cycle. Tenderness, swelling or pain may occur.

CYST (in breast) – a small sac or mass filled with fluid

D **DIAGNOSTIC MAMMOGRAM** – the use of an x-ray to check for breast cancer after a lump or other sign of possible disease has been found

DIGITAL MAMMOGRAPHY – a way to record x-ray images of the breast using a computer

DUCTS – tubes or channels that carry body fluids. Breast ducts (mammary glands) transport milk to the nipple

DUCTAL CARCINOMA IN SITU (DCIS) – cancer-like cells confined to one of the breast ducts. They do not spread, but if they are not removed, they can lead to breast cancer.

E **EXCISIONAL BIOPSY** – a biopsy in which the goal is total removal of a suspicious tissue area for microscopic examination. Excisional biopsies cut the entire lump from the breast.

F **FALSE NEGATIVE (mammograms)** – an incorrect result of a breast x-ray that shows cancer is not present when in fact, it is

FALSE POSITIVE (mammograms) – an incorrect result of a breast x-ray that shows cancer is present when in fact, it is not

FAT NECROSIS – lumpy fatty tissue that can form in the breast in response to a bruise or punch in the chest area or in response to surgery

FIBROADENOMA – a benign, firm lump in the breast that is painless and moves around easily when touched

FIBROCYSTIC DISEASE – a sometimes painful or uncomfortable condition in which lumps that are benign develop in one or both breasts

G **GENERALIZED BREAST LUMPINESS** – see Fibrocystic disease

H **HORMONES** – chemicals released into the blood by endocrine glands to regulate activities of certain cells and organs

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT) – medications that contain hormones are taken to offset the symptoms and other effects of the hormone loss that accompanies menopause.

HYPERPLASIA – abnormal increase in cell growth

I **INCISIONAL BIOPSY** – a biopsy in which the goal is partial removal of a suspicious tissue area for microscopic examination

INFILTRATING CANCER – cancer that has spread beyond its initial location to other parts of the body

INTRADUCTAL PAPILLOMA – a benign tumor that looks like a wart and starts in the duct of a breast. The condition is sometimes associated with an increased risk of developing breast cancer.

INVASIVE CANCER – see infiltrating cancer

L **LOBES (also called lobules, bulbs)** – the milk-producing tissues of the breast

Rx Riddles Solved!

Doctors, pharmacists and others use a medical “shorthand.” What difference does it make if your doctor’s handwriting isn’t legible? It might mean the difference between AP and ap!

āā	- ana, so much of each
a.c.	- ante cibum, before meals
ad effect	- until effective
ad lib	- as much as desired
AP	- ante partum, before childbirth
ap	- ante prandium, before dinner
aq	- aqua, water
bid	- bis in die, twice each day
c̄	- cum, with
dbl	- double
h.s.	- hora somni, at bedtime
i.d.	- idem, the same
IM	- intramuscular
k	- constant
mb	- misce bene, mix well
MDR	- minimum daily requirement
MED	- minimum effective dose
npo	- nil peros, nothing by mouth
ō	- nono, without
O.D.	- oculus dexter, right eye
O.S.	- oculus sinister, left eye
p̄	- post, after
per os	- by mouth
prn	- pro re nata, as needed
qh	- quaque hora, every hour
qid	- quater in die, four times each day
qv	- quantum vis, as much as you wish
Rx	- recipe, prescription
STAT	- statim, immediately
sum	- sumat, let it be taken
T or T°	- temperature
t	- time
tid	- ter in die, three times each day
ut dict	- ut dictum, as directed
vid	- see
w	- weight
w/	- with
X	- unknown factor

LOCALIZATION BIOPSY – the use of mammography to locate tissue that may be cancerous so it can be removed for microscopic examination

LOCAL RECURRENCE – cancer that has returned to the original location of the tumor

LUMPECTOMY – a surgical procedure to remove only the cancerous breast lump

LYMPH NODES – small, bean-sized glands located throughout the body that remove cell waste and fight infections. Some breast cancers can spread to the lymph nodes located under a woman's arm.

M MALIGNANT – tending to become worse or invasive

MAMMARY DUCT ECTASIA – a benign, sometimes painful breast condition that affects the ducts beneath the nipple

MAMMOGRAM – an x-ray examination of the breast

MASTECTOMY – surgery to remove all or part of the breast to reduce the risk of cancer

MASTITIS – a bacterial breast infection that typically affects nursing mothers

MENOPAUSE – the time in a woman's life when she stops having her menstrual period. This typically occurs between the ages of 45 and 55.

n NEEDLE BIOPSY – a procedure in which tissue from the breast is removed with a needle as an alternative to surgery. The advantage is that it leaves little scarring and is less expensive.

NIPPLE DISCHARGE – abnormal release of fluid from the nipple

NONPALPABLE CANCER – cancer in breast tissue that can only be seen on a mammogram test

O ONCOLOGIST – a doctor who specializes in studying, diagnosing and treating cancer

ONE-STEP PROCEDURE – an operation that combines a biopsy and a surgery

P PALPATION – a doctor's use of the fingers to feel tissue and organs under the skin

PATHOLOGIST – a doctor who identifies disease by studying tissue under a microscope

POSITRON EMISSION TOMOGRAPHY

(PET scan) – PET scans help identify where cancer resides. This x-ray test uses radioactive glucose which travels through the body and gets stuck in cancer cells.

PROPHYLACTIC MASTECTOMY

(preventive mastectomy) – surgery to remove a breast that is not known to contain cancer, to reduce one's risk of eventually developing the disease.

R RADIATION THERAPY – the use of high-energy rays (radiation) to damage or destroy cancer cells

RADIATION ABSORBED DOSE (RAD) – a unit of measure for radiation

RADIOACTIVE GLUCOSE – a special substance the body uses like normal glucose that gets trapped in cancerous cells and allows doctors to locate cancerous tissue in a PET scan.

RADIOLOGIST – a doctor with special training in the use of x-rays

RISK FACTORS (for cancer) – health conditions that are believed to increase a person's chances for getting cancer such as family history or previous abnormal breast biopsies.

S SCLEROSING ADENOSIS – a benign breast condition involving increased, abnormal growth of tissues in the breast's lobes

STEREOTACTIC LOCALIZATION BIOPSY – the use of a three-dimensional x-ray to pinpoint a suspicious area and then perform a needle biopsy

T TAMOXIFEN – a common hormonal drug used to treat breast cancer. It is also used to reduce the risk of cancer in high risk patients.

TISSUE – a collection of similar cells acting together to perform a particular function

TUMOR – any abnormal growth of tissue, can be benign or malignant

TUMOR MARKERS – when certain substances that are normally present in small amounts in the blood or other tissues rise above normal, it could mean cancer is present in the body.

X X-RAY – a high-energy form of radiation used to take a very precise photo of a part of the body

Diagnosing Breast Cancer Web sites

MLA finds the following Web sites particularly useful for understanding breast cancer. For a current list, visit <http://www.mlanet.org>.

American Cancer Society

<http://cancer.org/>

Web site features: news, information on types of cancer, patient services, treatment options, sections on children with cancer and living with cancer and cancer statistics.

Association of Cancer Online Resources

<http://www.acor.org/>

Web site features: links to cancer list-servs, resources, cancer topics, treatment options, clinical trials and publications.

breastcancer.org

<http://www.breastcancer.org/>

Web site features: tips for lowering risk, information on symptoms and diagnosis, news and research, library of terms, interactive discussion lists, treatment options and downloadable brochures.

Cancer Care, Inc.

<http://www.cancercare.org/>

Web site features: online support groups, telephone education workshops, resources, links to support, educational, treatment and information services.

CancerNet-National Cancer Institute

http://cancer.gov/cancer_information/

Web site features: information on types of cancer; treatment options; clinical trials; genetics, causes, risk factors and prevention; testing; coping and support resources.

Intercultural Cancer Council

<http://icc.bcm.tmc.edu/>

Web site features: cancer statistics and fact sheets about minorities and underserved populations, news and resource links.

Oncolink

<http://oncolink.upenn.edu/>

Web site features: a collection of Internet resources on the prevention and treatment of cancer maintained by the University of Pennsylvania Cancer Center. Includes news, book reviews, disease and patient support links.

Women's Cancer Network

<http://www.wcn.org/>

Web site features: the types of cancer that affect women, cancer risks for women, and a search engine to locate gynecologic oncologists. It includes links to related sites, publications and support groups.

MLA's Cancer Librarians Section Web site contains tips on evaluating Web sites and a list of patient cancer libraries in the United States and Canada.

<http://www.selu.com/cancerlib/index.html>

MLA MEDICAL LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

Quality information for improved health

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