OPTIMA prelim: a randomised feasibility study of personalised care in the treatment of women with early breast cancer

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

What was the problem?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK. After surgery, doctors often advise chemotherapy. We know that this is life-saving for some patients. However, we also know that many patients would do just as well without it. The problem is that doctors cannot pick out who actually needs chemotherapy, so they play safe. They use quite simple methods, for example measuring the size of the cancer, to decide. Therefore, many patients have to undergo chemotherapy to benefit the few who need it. Recently, scientists have developed new laboratory tests to look at breast cancers. They claim that these tests can find out which patients need chemotherapy.

What did we do?

We ran a pilot study using one of these tests. Our study was called Optimal Personalised Treatment of early breast cancer usIng Multiparameter Analysis (OPTIMA) prelim, in which 313 women took part. Half of the women had chemotherapy as usual. The other half had a test [called Oncotype DX® (Genomic Health Inc., Redwood City, CA, USA)] to decide whether or not they should have chemotherapy.

What did we find?

We showed that patients and their doctors are willing to trust the test. The test can be used in NHS clinics without delaying treatment. We also compared several different tests against each other. We worked out which test we should use in a larger study.

What does this mean?

We can now run a much larger study with 4500 patients taking part. This will let us answer one of the most important questions in breast cancer: can we safely reduce the number of people who have chemotherapy?

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