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

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Declared competing interests of authors: Robert C Stein reports grants from the NIHR-UCLH Biomedical Research Centre during the conduct of the study; grants and personal fees from Celgene Ltd and grants from Amgen Ltd outside the submitted work. Christopher Poole reports personal fees from Genomic Health outside the submitted work. Andreas Makris reports personal fees from Genomic Health during the conduct of the study. John MS Bartlett reports the following, all outside the submitted work: personal fees and other (support in kind) from BioNTech AG; personal fees from GE Healthcare; other (support in kind) from NanoString Technologies Inc.; other (support in kind) from Genoptix Medical Laboratory; grants from the NIHR HTA programme; grants from Cancer Research UK; grants from Celgene Ltd; grants from Ontario Institute for Cancer Research (OICR) High Impact Clinical Trials (HICT) Programme; grants from The Breast Cancer Research Foundation; grants from Medical Research Council; grants from Pfizer (UK); grants from Breakthrough Breast Cancer; grants from European Union; grants from The Breast Cancer Institute (UK); grants from European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer; grants from Roche Pharmaceuticals Limited; personal fees from Daiichi Sankyo Pharma Development; and personal fees from Rexahn Pharmaceuticals Inc.
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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**This report**

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 10/34/01. The contractual start date was in May 2012. The draft report began editorial review in May 2014 and was accepted for publication in September 2015. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health.

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