

Researchers take aim at metastatic breast cancer

By Amy Westervelt, Wall Street Journal

Scientists and doctors seeking to unravel some of the mysteries behind the deadliest form of breast cancer have put out a call to patients diagnosed with the disease: Please send us your DNA.

These researchers are creating a national database of patients' blood and tumor samples, along with their medical records, to better understand what triggers metastatic, or stage IV, breast cancer and how it might be stopped.

Led by the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, a nonprofit academic research institution focused on accelerating the understanding and treatment of disease, the ambitious Metastatic Breast Cancer Project is part of a broader effort to shine a spotlight on a type of cancer that many activists say has gotten short shrift. While prevention and early detection of breast cancer has grown immensely in recent decades, thanks to 30 years of pink-ribbon campaigns, the number of women dying from metastatic breast cancer has remained steady at about 40,000 annually since the 1970s.

"We're asking for a redistribution of research funding for breast cancer that's revenue-neutral," says Kelly Shanahan, a South Lake Tahoe obstetrician diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer two years ago, and who met with California Sen. Dianne Feinstein last year. "It can make a huge difference."

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