

## POSTER ABSTRACTS

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### Cancer 31

#### **Qualitative Analysis of Patient Reactions to Genetic Testing for Hereditary Cancer Risk**

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**Background:** In September, 2002, Myriad Genetics, Inc. initiated an intensive five-month direct-to-consumer advertising (DTC-ad) campaign for genetic testing for the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, projected to reach more than 90% of women in the Denver and Atlanta Metropolitan Areas aged 25-54 an average of 16.5 times each.

**Objective:** To determine if perceptions or concerns about genetic testing varied by exposure to the DTC-ad.

**Methods:** A survey was sent to 1600 randomly selected female members of Kaiser Permanente Colorado (KPCO- test site) and Henry Ford Health System (HFHS- control site) aged 25-54 years. The survey instrument began with a brief description of genes and hereditary risk for cancer, and women were asked to write a word or phrase that came to mind when thinking about the phrase "genetic testing for breast or ovarian cancer risk". A codebook was developed to classify themes and perceptions between those exposed to the DTC-ad and those not exposed.

**Results:** The survey had a response rate of 40%, with 64% reporting being exposed to the ad and 36% not exposed. Of the unexposed, 53% were from HFHS. Overall, there was an even distribution of women reporting a positive feeling about testing ("this is great!") vs. those who thought it was "scary", with an additional 14% stating simply the word "cancer". Many reported the phrase made them think about prevention or cure for cancer. A small number also mentioned specific fears of insurance or job discrimination. Significantly more women at KPCO had questions about testing such as, "is it for me?", "can I test", or "am I at risk" or simply mentioned their family history ("my mother had cancer") vs. women from HFHS.

**Conclusions:** The idea of genetic testing for breast cancer risk elicits both positive and negative feelings, including misconceptions ("curing cancer"). Such may be barriers to uptake of genetic services or negatively impact a woman's counseling experience. These concerns could be incorporated into educational materials as well as elicited and addressed in counseling sessions.