



Report Card

CALIFORNIA TEACHERS LEAD RESEARCH EFFORT

Friends Cathie Hays and Randa Krakow go way back. After all, Cathie's little son Tommy was a student in Randa's second grade classroom at Del Mar Elementary. And "little" Tommy is now 21 years old.

Cathie and Randa share other life experiences, too. Today, both are California public school teachers in Del Mar — Cathie at Carmel Del Mar Elementary and Randa at Del Mar Heights. Unfortunately, they also shared a deep shock last year. Cathie's doctor told her that the lump she had found in her breast was malignant. For Cathie, it was unexpected, life-changing news. For Randa, it was another reminder of the threat of the disease; both

her mother and sister had been diagnosed with it.

When Cathie got the diagnosis, it pointed out the seeming randomness of the disease. "My sons said, 'How could you get cancer? You're so health-conscious.'" Cathie remembers. "You don't smoke or drink.' And I think they meant, 'And you don't have any fun,' as well" laughs Cathie.

But the teachers at Carmel Del Mar are concerned. "In our wing of four classrooms, four teachers have been diagnosed with breast cancer in the past three years" notes Cathie.

"It's very frightening. But our district has been proactive in responding. Tom Bishop, our superintendent, brought in people to check the air and the water. Our community, parents and school board care a lot about us and are concerned. So far, I don't think that there is anything environmental that has caused this."

"My doctor says that it could be that teachers are well-insured and well-educated and that's why we are seeing more breast cancer. I want to believe that it is random."

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"STRESS."

At times, the word seems synonymous with "teacher." How does stress impact a teacher's health? Is stress associated with cancer?

This issue was the major focus of the 2000 California Teachers Study survey.

Did you complete and return your survey? If not, a new copy accompanies this newsletter. Please take a look at it. We need to include your experiences to better answer these questions. And to those who have already returned it — many thanks.

HAVE YOU MOVED?

SAVE THIS CARD! The California Teachers Study is a long-term research project. To assure that you receive future newsletters containing study updates, please save this postcard and return it to us if your name or address changes. Thank you!

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CANCER OF FEMALE ORGANS: HOW DO TEACHERS COMPARE?

Research has shown that some Americans, especially women, overestimate their risk of cancer. From time to time, one hears that teachers in particular have an increased risk of some cancers. In fact, a recognized slight increase in the risk of breast cancer among teachers spurred the creation of the California Teachers Study. So what are we learning about cancer among teachers as compared with other Californian women?

In each of the three Teachers Study surveys that have been conducted so far, study members have reported any occurrence of cancer since the study began. Also, by searching the California Cancer Registry, the state cancer registry that is used for cancer control and research, we are better able to fully describe cancer patterns in the Teachers Study.

Breast Cancer

Since the number of study members is so large, and since breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, we would expect to learn of quite a few breast cancers since the study began in 1995. Table 1 shows the number of new breast cancers from the beginning of 1996 through the end of 1998. The numbers are shown separately by race and ethnic group, since the risk of breast cancer is very different between such groups.

Figure 1 shows the incidence rates of breast cancer by age among California teachers and other California women. Indeed, teachers have a higher incidence throughout adult life. While we don't know exactly why this is, it is consistently observed that women with more education or a higher income are at greater risk. This is at least partly due to the fact that women who delay child-birth and have fewer children, as many professional women do, are known to be at increased risk. The Teachers Study will provide new answers to questions about teachers and breast cancer.

Cervical Cancer

Invasive cancer of the cervix is a disease that is largely preventable when women get screened regularly (Pap test). In contrast to breast cancer, risk of this disease is lower among women with more education or income. Only 21 Teachers Study members have developed invasive cervical cancer.

Uterus Cancer

Cancer of the uterus (Table 2) is much less common than breast cancer. California teachers appear to experience more cancer of the uterus than do other California women (Figure 2). Again, women with greater education and

income may be at slightly higher risk. Use of some estrogen-containing medications may increase risk of this disease, although these medications help prevent other important illnesses, including cardiovascular disease.

Ovarian Cancer

Fortunately, this disease is relatively rare (Table 3), with just 125 Teachers Study members affected.

Due to these small numbers, comparison with other California women is approximate at best. While Figure 3 appears to show teachers at higher risk, the differences are too small to draw conclusions.

TEACHERS



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The following tables show the numbers of various cancers diagnosed among women in the California Teachers Study from 1996 through 1998.

TABLE 1 BREAST CANCER		
RACE	NO BREAST CANCER 1996-98	BREAST CANCER 1996-98
None specified	990	14
White	99,649	1,236
Black	3,083	36
Hispanic	5,024	35
Asian/Pacific Islanders	4,167	45
Other/Mixed	2,500	21
Total	115,413	1,387

The following figures show comparisons between the age-specific incidence rates of various cancers diagnosed in California teachers versus all non-Hispanic white women in California from 1996 through 1998.

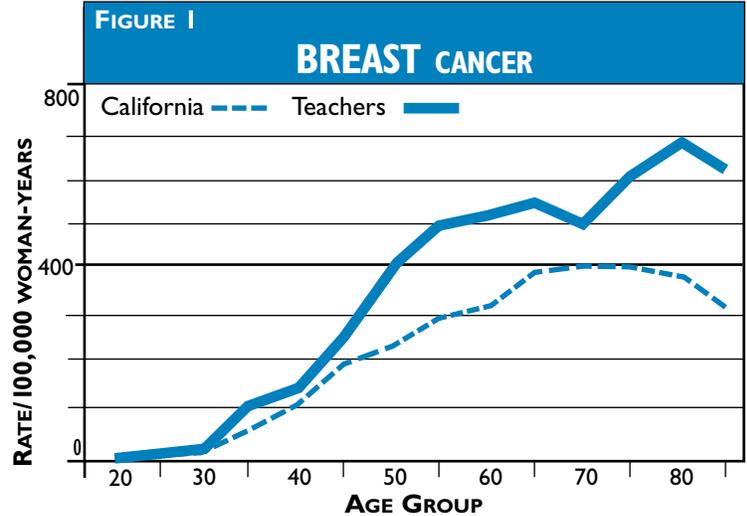


TABLE 2 UTERUS CANCER		
RACE	NO UTERUS CANCER 1996-98	UTERUS CANCER 1996-98
None specified	1,046	1
White	104,657	248
Black	3,251	2
Hispanic	5,174	3
Asian/Pacific Islanders	4,331	9
Other/Mixed	2,586	4
Total	121,045	267

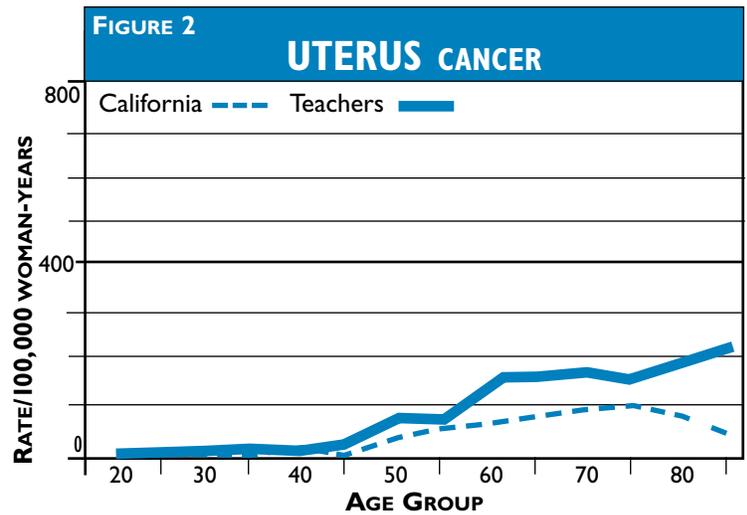
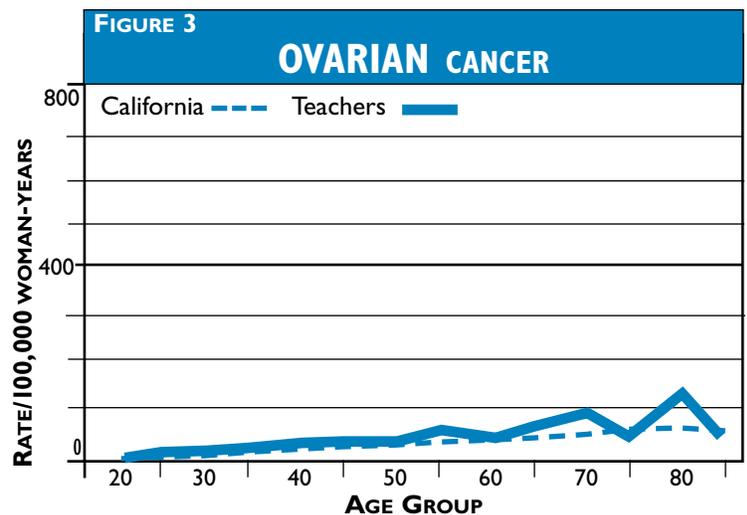


TABLE 3 OVARIAN CANCER		
RACE	NO OVARIAN CANCER 1996-98	OVARIAN CANCER 1996-98
None specified	1,056	0
White	105,658	113
Black	3,260	3
Hispanic	5,180	6
Asian/Pacific Islanders	4,362	1
Other/Mixed	2,611	4
Total	122,127	127



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Randa and Cathie have been members of the California Teachers Study since its inception in 1995. “It is such a huge study that it has to have significance,” states Randa. “I think women’s health has been neglected in recent years, so I’m glad to see that this is happening.” Randa encourages teachers to participate in research projects like



Cathie Hays

the CTS. “I was in the Breast Cancer Prevention Trial a couple of years ago with Tamoxifen. My mother had breast cancer – she’s doing fine now – but her sister died of it. A study like the Teachers Study will benefit all women, not just teachers.”

When reminded that the CTS can study other important health events besides breast cancer, Cathie was enthusiastic. “How about kidney cancer, because we never get to go to the bathroom! And menopause, because a woman’s life span is different in how her body functions and works.” “Stress and mental health are also important,” added Randa.

“I would tell teachers that by participating in the Teachers Study, they could be influencing the lives of many other people” remarks Cathie. “We are having an impact on the rate at which we gain knowledge, and knowledge is power over disease. Until something happens close to you, you don’t recognize the importance of things.”



Randa Krakow