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Drug cuts risk of breast cancer

Raloxifene also has fewer side effects

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A new study has found that the osteoporosis drug raloxifene is as effective as the well-known tamoxifen in preventing breast cancer in certain women — with fewer serious side effects.

The study, one of the largest ever conducted on breast-cancer prevention, was sponsored by the National Cancer Institute.

According to initial results released yesterday, both drugs cut in half the breast-cancer risk among postmenopausal women at higher-than-average risk of the dis-

ease, such as those with a family history of the cancer.

"We have another, perhaps safer, drug," said Dr. Ed Romond, a professor of medicine at the University of Kentucky's Markey Cancer Center.

The clinical trial, which involved nearly 20,000 women in the United States and Canada, was coordinated by a network of cancer researchers. Participants included 26 women at the University of Louisville's James Graham Brown Cancer Center, 70 at Norton Healthcare's Louisville Oncology and 62 through UK.

Women taking part were randomly assigned to receive either 60 milligrams of raloxifene, also known as Evista, or 20 milligrams of tamoxifen daily for five years.

One of the participants was Betty Roysse, 72, of Louisville,

whose mother lost a breast to cancer.

"When it's there in your family, you know you're a candidate" for the disease, Roysse said. "And you do worry."

Roysse took raloxifene and said she would be willing to continue to use it under her doctor's supervision. The drug is approved specifically for preventing and treating osteoporosis, but doctors can prescribe it for other purposes.

Dixie Baird of Louisville, who said breast cancer struck four of her relatives, received tamoxifen during the study. She said she would be happy to continue using that drug.

"I didn't have any side effects," said Baird, 65.

In the overall study, however,

See **STUDY**, B2, col. 1

STAR TRIAL RESULTS

► The Study of Tamoxifen and Raloxifene, or STAR, was a clinical trial designed to see how one drug compares with the other in reducing the incidence of breast cancer in postmenopausal women at increased risk of developing the disease, such as those with a family history of breast cancer.

► Initial results show that raloxifene (marketed as Evista) is as effective as tamoxifen (Nolvadex) in reducing the risk of developing invasive breast cancer.

► Trial participants who took raloxifene had fewer serious side effects from the drug — such as uterine cancer, blood clots and cataracts — than participants who took tamoxifen.

► The study involved 19,747 women, including 199 from Kentucky and 222 from Indiana.

ON THE WEB

These Web sites allow you to calculate your breast-cancer risk:

- www.cancer.gov/bcrisktool
- breastcancerprevention.com

STUDY | Osteoporosis drug found effective in preventing breast cancer in so

Continued from B1

tamoxifen resulted in more serious side effects than raloxifene. Of participants who had not had a hysterectomy, 36 of 4,732 who took tamoxifen developed uterine cancers, compared with 23 of 4,712 who took raloxifene.

Women in the raloxifene group also had 29 percent fewer blood clots in a major vein or the lung than women in the tamoxifen group. And results suggest that raloxifene doesn't increase the risk of developing a cataract, as tamoxifen does.

The number of invasive breast cancers was about the

same in both groups, as was the number of strokes.

When faced with the choice of whether to use one drug or the other, "raloxifene would seem to make more sense," said Lori Garvey, director of public relations

for the group that coordinated the trial, the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project.

But doctors said they are both effective drugs. Many women don't develop side effects, and

one drug might work better for a particular woman than the other.

Dr. Jeffrey Hargis, a medical oncologist at the Brown Cancer Center, suggested that doctors wait to learn more about the study before changing their pre-

scribing habits.

"We're going to all be waiting to digest the fine details of the trial," he said.

Romond said he would hesitate to prescribe raloxifene to the right woman under