

RCOG and BMS welcome Women's Health Initiative's (WHI) study on HRT and breast cancer incidence and mortality

For immediate release

Wednesday 29th July 2020

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) and the British Menopause Society (BMS) welcome the results of the Women's Health Initiative's clinical trial on the association of menopausal hormone therapy (HRT) with breast cancer incidence and mortality.

The study found that women who took oestrogen-only HRT were less likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer than women who did not take any form of HRT.

Furthermore, the overall findings are in keeping with The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance on treatment of menopausal symptoms which notes a small increased risk of breast cancer associated with combined-HRT.

The long-term clinical trials, published in [JAMA](#), involved over 27,000 women, who were enrolled between 1993 to 1998 and followed-up in 2017.

Dr Edward Morris, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said:

"This study, taken over a substantial period of time, concludes that oestrogen-only HRT appears to reduce the risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer.

"The findings from this research should be helpful to both women and doctors, particularly around when considering whether to start hormone therapy, for how long and which preparation they could take – whether it includes oestrogen and progestogen combined, or oestrogen alone.

"Women must be informed of the risks so they can weigh these up against the benefits that they may have from taking HRT."

Mr Haitham Hamoda, Chair of the British Menopause Society, said:

"We hope that both women and clinicians are reassured by these positive findings that, not only are in keeping with NICE guidance, but have also found that there may be a significant decrease in the risk of breast cancer diagnosis and a significant reduction in breast cancer mortality when oestrogen-only HRT is taken. Women who took combined oestrogen and progestogen HRT had an increased risk of breast cancer compared to placebo, in keeping with the NICE guideline conclusions, but had no significant difference in breast cancer mortality compared with placebo. These important findings on breast cancer mortality contrast with the most recent follow-up data from the Million Women Study.

Further, in contrast to the 2019 Collaborative meta-analysis, the WHI study showed no significant increase in the risk of diagnosis of breast cancer in women who were past users of HRT at the time of taking part in the WHI study compared to that in women who had not used HRT before taking part in the WHI study.

"Every woman experiences the menopause differently and symptoms vary. These can be extremely debilitating for some women and can have a significant impact on their physical and psychological well-being.

“Many women are still suffering in silence and are reluctant to seek advice and support due to concerns around the risks of breast cancer associated with HRT. We hope that this study is reassuring to women who are considering taking HRT.”

Notes to editors

For media enquiries, please contact the RCOG press office on 020 7045 6773 or email pressoffice@rcog.org.uk

For more information, please visit the [RCOG’s hub on the menopause](#) and women’s health in later life. RCOG [information leaflet](#) on treatments to manage menopausal symptoms. NICE guideline [Menopause: diagnosis and management](#)

About the RCOG

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is a medical charity that champions the provision of high quality women’s healthcare in the UK and beyond. It is dedicated to encouraging the study and advancing the science and practice of obstetrics and gynaecology. It does this through postgraduate medical education and training and the publication of clinical guidelines and reports on aspects of the specialty and service provision. For more information, visit the [website](#).

About the BMS

The British Menopause Society (BMS), established in 1989, educates, informs and guides healthcare professionals in all aspects of post reproductive health. The British Menopause Society is a specialist society affiliated to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.