What ethical issues arise regarding breast cancer genetic testing within the context of family?

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Abstract:

Introduction: A woman with a family history of breast cancer, especially among first-degree relatives (i.e. mother and daughter), has a higher risk for developing the disease. Approximately 5% to 10% of all breast cancer cases are hereditary and caused by gene mutations (BRCA 1 or 2). Unfortunately, individuals who inherit gene mutations are 80% more likely to develop breast cancer during their lifetime. Some may argue that autonomy and the right to privacy would be violated if breast cancer genetic test results were shared with family members. Conversely, others argue that we have a responsibility to protect future generations. The purpose of this study is to identify the ethical issues related to disclosure of breast cancer genetic test results. What are the ethical and familial issues for breast cancer genetic testing?

Method(s): A systematic review of CINAHL, Web of Science, and MEDLINE electronic databases was conducted. Sample criteria included breast cancer studies, written in English, ethics, and genetic testing. All qualitative and quantitative studies that met these criteria between 1994 to 2009 were included: 49 articles met the criteria.

Results: Findings were equivocal about family members sharing their breast cancer genetic test results with other family members. Stigma, fear, and guilt were found to be burdensome for the individual. Some family members may not want to know test results. Other individuals will share genetic test results because of their religious beliefs.

Discussion & Conclusions: It is important for health care providers to be prepared to help families manage ethical issues regarding breast cancer genetic testing. Health care providers
should offer clients education about breast cancer (i.e. biology, pathology, and treatment) but also include psychological, social, and ethical elements.

**Abstract History:**
This abstract has not been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.

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