

# Genetic Counseling, Testing, and Management of HBOC in India: An Expert Consensus Document from Indian Society of Medical and Pediatric Oncology

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## abstract

**PURPOSE** Hereditary breast and ovarian cancer (HBOC) syndrome is primarily characterized by mutations in the *BRCA1/2* genes. There are several barriers to the implementation of genetic testing and counseling in India that may affect clinical decisions. These consensus recommendations were therefore convened as a collaborative effort to improve testing and management of HBOC in India.

**DESIGN** Recommendations were developed by a multidisciplinary group of experts from the Indian Society of Medical and Pediatric Oncology and some invited experts on the basis of graded evidence from the literature and using a formal Delphi process to help reach consensus. PubMed and Google Scholar databases were searched to source relevant articles.

**RESULTS** This consensus statement provides practical insight into identifying patients who should undergo genetic counseling and testing on the basis of assessments of family and ancestry and personal history of HBOC. It discusses the need and significance of genetic counselors and medical professionals who have the necessary expertise in genetic counseling and testing. Recommendations elucidate requirements of pretest counseling, including discussions on genetic variants of uncertain significance and risk reduction options. The group of experts recommended single-site mutation testing in families with a known mutation and next-generation sequencing coupled with multiplex ligation probe amplification for the detection of large genomic rearrangements for unknown mutations. Recommendations for surgical and lifestyle-related risk reduction approaches and management using poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase inhibitors are also detailed.

**CONCLUSION** With rapid strides being made in the field of genetic testing/counseling in India, more oncologists are expected to include genetic testing/counseling as part of their clinical practice. These consensus recommendations are anticipated to help homogenize genetic testing and management of HBOC in India for improved patient care.

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## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Data Supplement

Author affiliations and support information (if applicable) appear at the end of this article.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hereditary breast and ovarian cancer (HBOC) syndrome is characterized by an autosomal-dominant inheritance pattern with increased risk of early-onset breast cancer (BC) and ovarian cancer (OC) in multiple family members.<sup>1,2</sup> HBOC syndrome is associated with 50% to 85% lifetime risk of BC and 15% to 30% risk of OC in women.<sup>3,4</sup> Mutations in *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* are commonly implicated in HBOC.<sup>5</sup> Founder mutations—specific mutations identified in a population with common ancestry—in *BRCA1/2* have been identified in Ashkenazi Jews, French Canadians, and Icelanders, among other populations worldwide.<sup>6</sup>

In India, BC is the most common cancer in women as well as the most common cause of cancer-related death in women.<sup>7</sup> The Indian scenario is characterized by younger median age of onset and a high incidence-to-mortality ratio compared with the West.<sup>8</sup> However, the burden of BC attributable to inherited mutations is not well characterized.

With the approval of poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase (PARP) inhibitors for both germline and somatic *BRCA1/2* mutations and data indicating the efficacy of platinum-based chemotherapy in *gBRCA* mutant cases, genetic testing has the potential to affect treatment decisions. Genetic tests improve the understanding of the risk of

## CONTEXT

### Key Objective

What are the current testing practices and effective approaches for advancing *BRCA* mutation testing and the management of hereditary breast and ovarian cancers in India?

### Knowledge Generated

Women with a personal or family history of breast, ovarian, tubal, or peritoneal cancer or who have an ancestry associated with *BRCA1/2* gene mutations should undergo genetic counseling. The experts recommended single-site mutation testing in families with a known mutation and next-generation sequencing coupled with multiplex ligation probe amplification for detection of large genomic rearrangements for unknown mutations. Recommendations also include surgical and lifestyle-related risk-reduction approaches and management using poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase inhibitors.

### Relevance

A growing number of oncologists in India are expected to implement genetic testing/counseling, and these consensus recommendations can be expected to standardize clinical practice for improved patient care.

future metachronous cancers in patients, which can be prevented by employing appropriate surgical or nonsurgical prophylactic measures.<sup>9</sup> Clinician and genetic counselors can prevent an almost inevitable cancer in previvors. Appropriate preventive steps are available for several non-*BRCA* genes, like *PALB2*, *CHEK2*, and *ATM1*.<sup>10</sup>

The prevalence of germline mutations; their relative frequencies in high-, moderate-, and low-penetrance genes; and their founder status all vary with geography and ethnicity. Pathogenic genetic mutation is estimated to occur in 10% to 15% of all patients with BC, with *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* accounting for 40% to 50% of pathogenic/likely pathogenic mutations.<sup>11,12</sup>

Leveraging the recent developments in the management of HBOC, more than 32 international guidelines published between 2010 and 2018 provide recommendations for genetic counseling and screening, preventive or risk reduction approaches, and systemic management of *BRCA*-mutated BC and OC, but all these guidelines cater to issues of Western patients.<sup>13</sup>

These recommendations were convened to evaluate current testing practices and referral workflows, suggest effective testing methods, and provide practical insights to advance *BRCA* mutation testing in India with the ultimate goal of improving treatment outcome and patient care.

## METHODOLOGY

Recommendations were developed by a multidisciplinary group of experts using evidence from phase III randomized controlled studies, relevant prospective and retrospective studies, and clinical experience as a guide.

The first meeting was organized on May 25, 2019, in Mumbai. The discussion centered on genetic counseling, methods of genetic testing, and challenges encountered during clinical practice and referrals with an Indian perspective in mind. The meeting involved extensive discussions of specific questions developed a priori by the committee

chairpersons to aid the discussion, followed by voting to reach a consensus using the Delphi process.

The Expert Panel corresponded frequently through e-mail; progress on guideline development was driven primarily by committee chairpersons. All members participated in the preparation of the draft. PubMed and Google Scholar databases were searched using the following key words: “hereditary breast and ovarian cancer”; “HBOC”; “*BRCA1/2* mutations”; “non-*BRCA* mutations”; “germline *BRCA* mutations”; “somatic *BRCA* mutations”; and “genetic testing”. Levels of evidence and grades of recommendation endorsed by the Infectious Diseases Society of America were applied.

## GENETIC COUNSELING IN INDIA: IMPORTANCE AND AWARENESS

Despite recent progress, genetic testing in HBOC remains underutilized in India.<sup>14</sup> The process of genetic counseling involves an attempt by one or more appropriately trained persons to help the individual or family to:

- Comprehend the medical facts: diagnosis and probable course of the disorder and available management options
- Understand how heredity contributes to the disorder and the risk of recurrence in first-degree mutation carrier relatives
- Understand the alternatives for dealing with the risk of recurrence
- Choose a course of action according to their risk and family goals
- Make the best possible adjustment to the disorder<sup>15-18</sup>

Genetic counseling before testing is endorsed by many international oncology working groups.<sup>1,19-21</sup> Guidelines from several countries, including Europe and Australia, advocate pretest and post-test genetic counseling for *BRCA1/2* by professionals who are adequately trained in genetics and clinical oncology.<sup>22,23</sup> In India, oncologists are often the first point of contact for these patients.<sup>18,24</sup>

**Components of HBOC Genetic Counseling**

**Pretest counseling.** The counselor would discuss the following issues to educate patients and suggests who should be tested first in the family. The following are key components:

- Medical history and pedigree evaluation up to 3 generations
- Application of mathematical risk assessment models/ qualitative criteria (eg, National Comprehensive Cancer Network [NCCN])
- Discussion of genetic testing recommendations
- Implications of genetic testing: benefits/harms
- Discussion of financial considerations
- Discussion of legal protection against genetic discrimination.<sup>18</sup>

**Assessment of family history.** Per the established standards, collection of complete family history should comprise a 3-generation pedigree analysis that includes information on age/year of birth for each individual, age at onset of cancer, age at death, cause of death (for deceased relatives), ethnic background of all grandparents (maternal and paternal), consanguinity, and any information on prior genetic testing, pregnancies, and half-siblings.<sup>25,26</sup>

**Risk communication.** Information on genetic testing results; treatment implications of pathogenic, benign variants, and variants of uncertain significance (VUS) and associated risk

for patients and predictive risk among relatives should be explained. A significant increase in medical knowledge and risk perception has been reported after pregenetic testing communication via face-to-face counseling, group discussion, and written communication—for example, information booklets—that eventually helped minimize anxiety in patients after receipt of test results.<sup>27-30</sup>

**Post-test counseling session.** The post-test counseling session involves an assessment of understanding and recall of medical facts conveyed during counseling, change in anxiety level, severity of risk perception, reproductive plans, and satisfaction with the quality and extent of genetic counseling.<sup>18</sup>

**GERMLINE BRCA TESTING**

**Assessment of Risk and Identifying Patients**

Germline mutations in *BRCA1/2* genes are regarded as high penetrance—a cancer relative risk of greater than 5—and have been characterized in several populations globally. Mutations in other non-*BRCA* genes, such as *PALB2*, *TP53*, *PTEN*, *CDH1*, *STK11*, *CHEK2*, *RAD51*, and *ATM*, are also known to confer risk of BC and/or OC, albeit with lower frequency and penetrance<sup>31</sup> (Tables 1 and 2). The lifetime risk of breast and ovarian malignancies is variable, with pathogenic mutations in *BRCA1* (BC: 46% to 87%; OC: 39% to 63%) and *BRCA2* (BC: 38% to 84%; OC: 17% to 27%). Other cancers associated with germline

**TABLE 1.** Genes Associated With HBOC

Gene/Locus	Syndrome	Breast Cancer Risk, %	Mutation/Minor Allele Frequency
High-penetrance genes			
<i>BRCA1</i> (17q21)	HBOC	60-85 lifetime 15-40 ovarian cancer	1/400
<i>BRCA2</i> (13q12.3)	HBOC	60-85 lifetime risk 13-23 ovarian cancer	1/400
<i>TP53</i> (17p13.1)	Li-Fraumeni syndrome	50-89 by age 50 90 in Li-Fraumeni syndrome survivors	< 1/10,000
<i>PTEN</i> (10q23.3)	Cowden syndrome	25-50 lifetime	< 1/10,000
<i>CDH1</i> (16q22.1)	Familial diffuse gastric cancer	RR, 6.6	< 1/10,000
<i>STK11/LKB1</i> (19p13.3)	Peutz Jegher syndrome	30-50 by age 70	< 1/10,000
Moderate-penetrance genes			
<i>CHEK2</i> (22q12.1)	Li-Fraumeni 2 syndrome	OR, 2.6 (for 100delC)	1/100-1/200 in certain populations
<i>BRIP1</i> (17q22)	Breast cancer	RR, 2.0	< 1/1,000
<i>ATM</i> (11q22.3)	Ataxia telangiectasia	RR, 2.37	1/33-1/333
<i>PALB2</i> (16p12)	Breast, pancreatic, prostate cancers	RR, 2.3	< 1/1,000
Low-penetrance genes			
<i>FGFR2</i> (10q26)	Breast cancer	OR, 1.26	0.38
<i>TOX3</i> (16q12.1)	Breast cancer	OR, 1.14	0.46
<i>LSP1</i> (11p15.5)	Breast cancer	OR, 1.06	0.3
<i>TGFB1</i> (19q13.1)	Breast cancer	OR, 1.07	0.68
<i>MAP3K1</i> (5q11.2)	Breast cancer	OR, 1.13	0.28

Abbreviations: HBOC, hereditary breast and ovarian cancer; OR, odds ratio; RR, relative risk.

*BRCA1/2* mutations include male BC (1% to 9%), prostate cancer (9% to 20%), pancreatic cancer (1% to 7%), and melanoma.<sup>32</sup> The largest analysis of 1,010 high-risk families across India<sup>33</sup> revealed *BRCA* mutations in 85% and non-*BRCA* mutations in 15% of families. Additional analysis based on age and family history showed a high prevalence of germline variants (75%) in younger patients age younger than 40 years with a first-degree family member affected with BC/OC.<sup>33</sup> A recent study from North India reported a 30% prevalence of *gBRCA* mutation in patients with BC/OC qualifying for NCCN criteria for testing, including 5 novel mutations.<sup>34</sup> A methodical review investigating the prevalence of germline variants in high-risk HBOC susceptibility genes in 1,028 patients of Indian descent with familial/early-onset/triple-negative BC or OC identified 18 *BRCA1* and 16 *BRCA2* variants that were not reported in the Breast Cancer Information Core or ClinVar databases.<sup>35</sup> The putative Ashkenazi founder mutation *BRCA1* 185delAG was detected in a low proportion of patients (4.2%), the majority of whom were from South India or who were Malaysians of Indian origin.<sup>36-38</sup> Table 3 provides a summary of deleterious germline mutations identified in Indian patients with HBOC.

Until now, our clinical practice has been to test patients who fulfill NCCN criteria for testing (Box 1); however, recent publications have emphasized that using NCCN guidelines misses many patients with both *BRCA* and non-*BRCA* mutations who would otherwise benefit.<sup>39</sup>

#### BOX 1. NCCN GUIDELINES 2019 FOR *gBRCA* RISK ASSESSMENT

- Individual from a family with a known *BRCA1/2* pathogenic/likely pathogenic variant, including such variants found on research testing
- Personal history of breast cancer (BC) plus one or more of the following:
  - Diagnosed age  $\leq$  45 years
  - Diagnosed age 46-50 years (an additional BC primary at any age or one or more close blood relative with BC at any age or one or more close blood relative with high-grade [Gleason score  $\geq$  7] prostate cancer)
  - An unknown or limited family history
  - Diagnosed age  $\leq$  60 years with triple-negative BC
  - Diagnosed at any age with: one or more close blood relative with BC diagnosed age  $\leq$  50 years; or OC, male BC, metastatic prostate cancer, or pancreatic cancer and two or more additional diagnoses of BC at any age in patient and/or close blood relatives)
  - Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry
- Personal history of OC

- Personal history of male BC
- Personal history of pancreatic cancer
- Personal history of metastatic prostate cancer
- Personal history of high-grade prostate cancer (Gleason score  $\geq$  7) at any age with one or more close blood relative with ovarian carcinoma, pancreatic cancer, or metastatic prostate cancer at any age or BC age  $<$  50 years; or two or more close blood relatives with BC, or prostate cancer (any grade) at any age; or Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry
- An individual who does not meet the other criteria but with one or more 1 first- or second-degree blood relative meeting any of the above criteria

The US Preventive Services Task Force (August 2019) recommends that primary care clinicians assess women with a personal or family history of BC, OC, tubal, or peritoneal cancer or who have an ancestry associated with *BRCA1/2* gene mutations with an appropriate brief familial risk assessment tool. Women with a positive result on the risk assessment tool should receive genetic counseling and, if indicated after counseling, genetic testing.<sup>40</sup>

#### WHOM TO TEST FIRST?

It is ideal to initiate genetic testing in a family member who is most likely to test positive for a pathogenic variant, which is usually a woman affected by early BC/OC (any age). Children should not be tested for *BRCA* before the age of 18 years.

#### Methods of Germline *BRCA* Detection

Germline genetic testing usually involves taking written informed consent for storage of biologic samples—blood sample, saliva, or cheek swab—and testing, followed by analysis of the sample for the detection of heritable germline mutations. Multigene panels using next-generation sequencing (NGS) coupled with the multiplex ligation probe amplification technique enables high-throughput genetic testing. The usual turnaround time to receive test results is 4 weeks. While selecting an NGS workflow, the following criteria should be considered to suit the genetic testing:

- a) Enrichment method: polymerase chain reaction amplification based or hybrid capture based;
- b) Sequencing chemistry: sequencing by synthesis or pH mediation; and
- c) Bioinformatic analysis

Studies examining NGS workflows for *BRCA1/2* genes in HBOC samples have demonstrated excellent performance, with almost 100% sensitivity and specificity, and cost effectiveness compared with single-site mutation testing in these genes.<sup>41</sup> Two studies from India have reported that the use of multigene panel testing by NGS for germline mutations in patients with HBOC.<sup>42,43</sup> The majority of *BRCA1/2* mutations may be single-base substitution missense or

nonsense mutations. Other mutations are small insertions or deletions that result in a prematurely truncated non-functional protein. Some deleterious variants may also include splice junction alterations that lead to exon skipping or the inclusion of intronic region, resulting in a nonfunctional protein. It is important to remember that NGS can miss large genomic rearrangements, which are causal pathogenic mutations, in 5% of patients with HBOC. Some experts recommend that as multiplex ligation probe amplification technique allows for the identification of large genomic rearrangements, it should be performed in all patients who test negative by NGS who have a strong clinical suspicion of HBOC.<sup>44,45</sup> The commonly used panels for HBOC syndrome include the following genes: *ATM*, *BRCA1*, *BRCA2*, *BRIP1*, *CHEK2*, *RAD50*, *RAD51D*, *RAD51C*, *PALB2*, *BAARD1*, *P53*, *STK11*, *CDH1*, *MSH2*, *MSH6*, *MLH1*, *EPCAM*, *PMS2*, *ATM*, *PTEN*, *FGFR2*, *TOX3*, *LSP1*, and *MAP3K1*.

**Interpretation of Sequencing Results**

Genetic testing helps detect sequence changes that may be benign, pathogenic, or VUS. International working groups provide guidelines for the interpretation of germline sequence variants and categorize the DNA sequence alterations qualitatively on the basis of functional evidence, family history, allele frequency data, and computational and in silico predictions (Table 4).

It is critical to note that when no deleterious germline mutation is detected in a proband, results should not be directly labeled as negative and the potential limitations of testing should be considered.<sup>44</sup> Some possibilities include that the patient has a pathogenic variant in another gene not included in the multigene panel; that the tested gene

has a sequence variant that cannot be easily detected by sequence analysis, such as large deletion; and that the patient has a sequence variant in a region, such as an intron or regulatory region of a gene, that may not be covered by the test.<sup>46</sup>

Interpretation of a variant for use in clinical decision making requires comprehensive knowledge of the patient’s phenotype, mode of inheritance for the disease gene, mutational mechanism (eg, haplo-insufficiency, dominant negative), protein structure/function, and the strength of the gene-disease relationship. Clinically relevant mutations are annotated using published variants in the literature and a set of disease databases—ClinVar, OMIM, GWAS, HGMD, and SwissVar. Nonsynonymous variant effects are calculated using multiple algorithms, such as PolyPhen-2, SIFT, Mutation Taster2, Mutation Assessor, and LRT. Only nonsynonymous and splice-site variants found in the hereditary cancer gene panel are used for clinical interpretation.

The test result obtained should be transcribed into a coherent genetic testing report that describes the test results and explains its significance for the proband and first-degree relatives. DNA change as a variant should be reported using the standard Human Genome Variation Society nomenclature that describes the nucleotide change in the cDNA as a c. and the consequent change in the amino acid and protein as a p., while mentioning the cDNA reference sequence used.

**VALIDATION OF TEST RESULT**

As results from genetic testing—for example, NGS—influence clinical treatment, validation of the test is critical.<sup>47,48</sup> The joint consensus from the Association for Molecular Pathology

**TABLE 2.** Cancer Risks Associated With *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*

Mutation	Lifetime Risk of Breast Cancer, %	Lifetime Risk of Ovarian Cancer, %
<i>BRCA1</i>	55-85	35-46
<i>BRCA2</i>	50-85	13-23
Cancer Type	Risk in Carriers to Age 70 Years*	Lifetime Risk in General Population, %
Breast	<i>BRCA1</i> : 55-70 <i>BRCA2</i> : 45-70	Approximately 12
Contralateral (opposite) breast	Up to 63 at 25 years postdiagnosis but highly age dependent	7 at 25 years postdiagnosis
Ovarian	<i>BRCA1</i> : Approximately 40 <i>BRCA2</i> : Approximately 15	Approximately 1
Colon	Unclear	Approximately 5
Prostate	Elevated; absolute risk not well defined	White: Approximately 14 African American: Approximately 19
Male breast	<i>BRCA1</i> : 1 <i>BRCA2</i> : 8	0.1
Pancreatic	<i>BRCA1</i> : Unclear <i>BRCA2</i> : 5	1.5
Other sites	To be determined	Varied

**TABLE 3.** Pathogenic *BRCA1/2* Mutations Identified in Indian Patients

Study	Region	Testing Method	Pathogenic <i>BRCA1/2</i> Mutations Identified
Valarmathi et al, 2003 <sup>90</sup>	New Delhi, North India	Direct sequencing	<i>BRCA 1</i> (E1250X in exon 11; E1754X in exon 20)
Rajkumar et al, 2003 <sup>49</sup>	Chennai, South India	Heteroduplex analysis/dHPLC	<i>BRCA1</i> (Ex12 1386 delCTCTC Stop 1389, Ex13 CGA→TGA Arginine1443 Stop), <i>BRCA2</i> (Ex110 1235delCTTAA stop 1237)
Saxena, 2006 <sup>91</sup>	New Delhi, North India	Heteroduplex analysis of PCR amplicons using exon-specific primers	<i>BRCA1</i> (185delAG in exon 2; 4184del4; 3596del4 in exon 11), <i>BRCA1</i> (4184del4 in exon 11)
Syamala et al, 2007 <sup>92</sup>	Kerala, South India	Direct sequencing	<i>BRCA2</i> (c.4642delAA, c.4926insGACC)
Thirthagiri et al, 2008 <sup>37</sup>	Malaysia, Indian ethnicity	dHPLC and DNA sequencing	<i>BRCA1</i> (180 delA, 185 delAG, 5370 C>T), <i>BRCA2</i> (9097 C>T)
Soumitra et al, 2009 <sup>93</sup>	Chennai, South India	PCR-dHPLC	<i>BRCA1</i> (c.4158_4162delCTCTC;p.Ser1369SerfsX2, c.4327C>T; p.R1443X, c.1148_1149delAT; p.Asn383Arg fsX6, c.4399C>T; p.Gln1467X, c.4705_4706insTGGAATC;p.Ile1567fsx5, c.5024_5025insT;p. Thr1675Thr fsX4, c.68_69delAG; p.Glu23Val fsX16, c.66_67delAG; p. Leu22Leu fsX18, c.5118_5120delAAT; p.del1707Ile); <i>BRCA2</i> (c.6214_6218delCTTAA;p.Ser2072Ser fsX4, c.5130_5133delTGTA;p.Tyr1693X, c.2621_2627delAACTGTC;p. Ile873Ile fsX19)
Vaidyanathan et al, 2009 <sup>38</sup>	South India	Heteroduplex analysis using CSGE and direct sequencing	<i>BRCA1</i> (185delAG)
Kang et al, 2014 <sup>36</sup>	Malaysia, Indian ethnicity	PCR and Sanger sequencing	<i>BRCA1</i> (185delAG)

Abbreviations: CSGE, conformation-sensitive gel electrophoresis; dHPLC, denaturing high-performance liquid chromatography; PCR, polymerase chain reaction.

and College of American Pathologists recommends the validation of every detected single-nucleotide variant or indel in the coding region that results in deleterious mutations and documenting it in terms of positive percentage agreement and positive predictive value.<sup>47</sup> Samples in which a deleterious variant/mutation is detected should be reconfirmed using fresh DNA extraction from a different aliquot of cells from the same patient by Sanger sequencing, a recognized gold-standard method.<sup>49</sup>

### HOW TO MANAGE VUS

VUS are genetic alterations that are usually single-base substitutions that result in a missense mutation and a different amino acid in the encoded protein. These alterations in the coding sites may be in the promoter regions, intronic regions close to exons, or may be small in-frame insertions and deletions and synonymous substitutions.<sup>50-52</sup> It is estimated that more than 20,000 unique variants have been identified in the coding, splice site, and intervening sequences of *BRCA* genes.<sup>53</sup> Almost 90% of *BRCA1/2* mutations can be classified either as pathogenic or benign; however, approximately 10% of them cannot be classified as deleterious or neutral and are labeled as VUS. It is estimated that on complete analysis, approximately 30% to 50% of VUS might actually be pathogenic.<sup>54-56</sup>

A VUS is characterized by gathering evidence, such as its co-occurrence with a deleterious mutation, cosegregation with disease in families, functional characterization

with available physiochemical, cellular and biologic assays, allelic frequency in databases that document well-characterized populations, and in silico assessment. Data-sharing initiatives, like the BRCA Challenge and the Evidence-Based Network for the Interpretation of Germline Mutant Alleles, aid in the assessment of VUS. The expanding database of HBOC genetic testing results and ongoing efforts targeted at determining the pathogenicity and categorizing VUS have resulted in a 13% decline in the rate of VUS detection between 2002 and 2013.<sup>57</sup>

As a result of the uncertainty of VUS, the International Agency for Research on Cancer does not recommend predictive genetic testing in at-risk relatives and emphasizes the need to treat VUS carriers as probands with no mutations. However, misinterpretation of VUS by clinicians has been reported, leading to unnecessary prophylactic surgery and patient anxiety.<sup>58</sup>

### QUALITY OF GENETIC TESTING: THE BACKBONE OF CHARACTERIZING *BRCA1/2* MUTATIONS

In an oncology setting, genetic testing addresses two purposes: identifying deleterious germline mutations in families with predisposition to cancers, followed by predictive genetic testing in these high-risk families; and identifying molecular markers or signatures in the tumors for treatment and prognosis. A robust methodology/algorithm in genetic testing is extremely important for maintaining test quality. The American Association of Pathologists' Assistants and the

**TABLE 4.** Classification of Sequence Variants by International Working Groups

International Agency for Research on Cancer		American College of Medical Genetics		Clinical Molecular Genetics Society	
Class	Description	Category	Description	Class	Description
5	Definitely pathogenic	1	Previously reported and is a recognized cause of the disorder	1	Certainly nonpathogenic
4	Likely pathogenic	2	Previously unreported and is of the type that is expected to cause the disorder	2	Unlikely to be pathogenic, but cannot be formally proven
3	Uncertain	3	Previously unreported and is of the type that may or may not be causative of the disorder	3	Likely to be pathogenic, but cannot be formally proven
2	Likely not pathogenic or of little clinical significance	4	Previously unreported and is probably not causative of disease	4	Certainly pathogenic
1	Not pathogenic or of no clinical significance	5	Previously reported and is a recognized neutral variant		
		6	Previously not known or expected to be causative of disease, but is found to be associated with a clinical presentation		

College of American Pathologists have developed guidelines for NGS bioinformatics pipelines, and laboratories should follow them to reduce error rates.<sup>59</sup> In addition, the guidelines emphasize the role of trained professionals to achieve optimal testing quality. Genetic testing that is based on national accreditation programs, various quality assessment programs, and participation in such schemes as the European Molecular Genetics Quality Network could help the testing laboratories maintain quality control.

**SOMATIC OR TUMOR BRCA TESTING**

Growing evidence suggests that tumors with somatically acquired *BRCA1/2* pathogenic mutations respond to drugs that inhibit PARP. As mentioned in germline testing, informed consent of the participant should be obtained before testing. Testing for somatic mutations with NGS becomes a method of choice because of its sensitivity compared with Sanger sequencing. A limitation of somatic *BRCA* testing is DNA extraction from formalin-fixed, paraffin-embedded specimens. These samples have a variable mix of neoplastic and normal stroma cell tissue, and the quantity of DNA extracted is low and of poor quality.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, tissue preservation using formalin induces a chemical crosslinking reaction with nucleotides that results in artifactual sequence alterations and deamination of cytosine nucleotides. Use of shorter amplicons, de-crosslinking steps, and treatment with uracil-DNA glycosylase—DNA repair enzyme—to markedly reduce the number of sequence artifacts before polymerase chain reaction amplification are steps recommended to improve the quality of extracted DNA.<sup>60,61</sup>

The tumor content for somatic *BRCA* testing must be certified by a trained pathologist. DNA from the tissue sample should be extracted from a single representative block using a standardized and validated method. Known positive and negative controls should be included during testing. Somatic testing is generally recommended at 500x

coverage to avoid a false-negative assessment. After testing, the bioinformatic pipeline should be able to filter out variants with 5% to 10% allele frequency on the basis of the initial tumor percentage.

The somatic testing report should include:

- a) Suitability of tumor sample for tumor content and specific testing method
- b) Number and names of genes tested (if using a multi-gene panel)
- c) Depth of coverage for each gene
- d) Details of mutation, if detected, with Human Genome Variation Society nomenclature
- e) Reference sequence of the gene
- f) Interpretation of results with reference to therapy

**Interpretation of Somatic or Tumor BRCA Result and Its Role**

Molecular signatures of homologous recombination deficiency from ovarian tumors and association with high loss of heterozygosity indicate genomic scarring and instability.<sup>62,63</sup> Although regarded as uncommon, sporadic somatic *BRCA1/2* mutations account for one third of *BRCA* mutations in OC and 4% to 15% of unselected triple-negative BC.<sup>64-66</sup>

In high-grade serous OC, *BRCA1/2* germline and somatic mutations are frequent (17% to 25%), with somatic mutations representing 18% to 30% of all *BRCA1/2* mutations. In a sequencing study, up to 9% of patients with OC had relevant somatic mutations in homologous recombinant genes (*BRCA1/2*, *BRIP1*, *CHEK2*, and *RAD51C*). Somatic mutations were highly predictive of primary platinum sensitivity and improved overall survival.<sup>67</sup>

Accumulating evidence suggests the role of somatically acquired *BRCA1/2* pathogenic mutations, tumor pathology, and loss of heterozygosity as predictive biomarkers of clinical response to PARP inhibitor.<sup>68-70</sup> In a phase II study,

patients with platinum-sensitive relapsed serous OC with positive *BRCA* mutations had the highest likelihood of benefiting from olaparib (median progression-free survival, 11.2 months in *BRCA* mutation-positive v 7.4 months in wild-type *BRCA* patients; hazard ratio, 0.54 [95% CI, 0.34 to 0.85];  $P = .0075$ ).<sup>69</sup>

### IMPLICATIONS OF TESTING *BRCA* (GERMLINE/TUMOR) MUTATIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF HBOC

The presence of pathogenic or likely pathogenic mutations in *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* has tremendous implications for the management of patients and unaffected relatives (previvors; Box 2).

#### Risk Management for the Previvor (unaffected carrier of mutation)

##### Lifestyle modifications.

- Regular exercise and maintaining a healthy body weight
- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Avoid hormone-replacement therapy
- Encourage breast feeding

NCCN recommends that *BRCA* carriers be offered prophylactic bilateral mastectomy.<sup>19</sup> In both retrospective and prospective observational studies, risk-reducing or prophylactic bilateral mastectomy decreases the incidence of BC by 90% or more in patients who are at risk for

hereditary BC, with most studies focusing on *BRCA* mutation carriers.<sup>71-73</sup>

For *BRCA1* carriers, risk-reducing bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy (rrBSO) is recommended for women who have completed childbearing and should be performed by age 35 to 40 years or individualized on the basis of age of onset of OC in the family.<sup>19</sup> In *BRCA2* carriers, this procedure can be delayed until age 40 to 45 years. rrBSO not only decreases the risk of OC in *BRCA* mutation carriers, but also decreases the risk of mortality.<sup>74-76</sup> NCCN does not routinely recommend hysterectomy at the time of rrBSO and indicates that “salpingectomy alone is not the standard-of-care and is discouraged outside a clinical trial.”<sup>19</sup>

**Cancer surveillance.** For female *BRCA* carriers who do not wish to pursue (or would rather delay) surgical risk reduction, BC surveillance should be offered, and OC screening may be performed.<sup>19</sup>

**BC screening.** The following strategy is recommended by expert groups for women with *BRCA* pathogenic variants who have not undergone risk-reducing surgery and should be individualized as needed:

- a) Breast awareness from 18 years of age
- b) Clinical breast examination every 6 to 12 months is recommended from the age of 25 or 10 years before the youngest BC.

## BOX 2. SUMMARY OF THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF MEDICAL AND PEDIATRIC ONCOLOGY CONSENSUS DOCUMENT ON HEREDITARY BREAST AND OVARIAN CANCER

Question	Recommendation	Level of Recommendation
1. Who should undergo genetic counseling?	All clinicians should assess: Women with a personal or family history of breast, ovarian, tubal, or peritoneal cancer; or an ancestry associated <i>BRCA1/2</i> gene mutations; and advise genetic counseling and, if indicated, genetic testing	VB
2. Who should undergo genetic testing?	Any breast cancer (BC) diagnosed at age < 45 years Any triple-negative BC age < 60 years Any male BC BC at any age and ≥ 1 close relative (first/second/third degree relative on same side of family) diagnosed with BC, ovarian cancer (OC), prostate, or pancreatic cancer Any woman with OC	VB
3. Who can perform genetic counseling?	Genetic counselors and other medical professionals (medical/surgical/radiation oncologists/breast surgeons) knowledgeable in genetic testing can provide patient education and counseling and make recommendations regarding genetic testing and arrange testing	VB
4. What points should be included in pretest counseling?	Rapport building, elicitation of need and comprehension levels Medical history and pedigree evaluation Decide the best test candidate to test first Genetic testing recommendations Implications of genetic testing: benefits/harms Variants of unknown significance Financial considerations Risk reduction options	VB



Question	Recommendation	Level of Recommendation
4. What genetic test should be offered?	Single-site mutation testing in families with a known mutation	VB
	For unknown mutation:  Essential: <i>BRCA1/2</i> sequencing by next-generation sequencing plus multiplex ligation probe amplification ( <i>MLPA</i> ; <i>BRCA1/2</i> ) for large genomic rearrangements (LGRs)  Desirable: Multigene panel testing (a representative model panel should include <i>BRCA1</i> , <i>BRCA2</i> , <i>p53</i> , <i>PTEN</i> , <i>CDH1</i> , <i>PALB2</i> , <i>CHEK2</i> , <i>ATM</i> , <i>RAD51C</i> , <i>STK11</i> , <i>RAD51D</i> , <i>BRIP1</i> , <i>MLH1</i> , <i>MSH2</i> , <i>MSH6</i> , and <i>PMS2</i> ) + <i>MLPA (BRCA1/2)</i> for LGRs	
5. What risk-reduction approaches should be offered to affected individuals?	Risk management for future cancers:	IIB
	Contralateral prophylactic mastectomy:	
	Risk-reduction mastectomy should be offered to patients with a previous history of BC who carry a germline genetic mutation in <i>BRCA1/2</i>	
	Risk-reducing bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy (rBSO): For <i>BRCA</i> carriers, rBSO is recommended for women who have completed childbearing, and should be performed by age 35 to 40 years. In <i>BRCA2</i> carriers, one can consider delaying this procedure until age 40 to 45	
6. What risk-reduction approaches should be offered to unaffected mutation carriers?	Advanced OC with <i>BRCA</i> mutation:	IA
	Prophylactic bilateral mastectomy is not considered in these cases as the risk of death from the primary malignancy is high over the next 5 years. In these cases, nonsurgical measures and surveillance only are used for any new primary malignancy in breasts	
6. What risk-reduction approaches should be offered to unaffected mutation carriers?	<i>BRCA1/2</i> :	VB
	Lifestyle modifications: Regular exercise, maintaining healthy body weight, limiting alcohol consumption	
	Avoid hormone replacement therapy, encourage breast feeding	
	Breast cancer: <i>BRCA</i> carriers should be offered prophylactic bilateral mastectomy; however, the final decision is based on personal preference, given that effective screening is available	
	Bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy: For <i>BRCA</i> carriers, risk-reducing bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy is recommended for women who have completed childbearing, and should be performed by age 35 to 40 years. In <i>BRCA2</i> carriers, one can consider delaying this procedure until age 40 to 45 years	
	Cancer surveillance: For female <i>BRCA</i> carriers who do not wish to pursue (or would rather delay) surgical risk reduction, BC surveillance should be offered, and OC screening may be performed	
	Breast cancer screening:	
	Breast awareness from age 18 years	
	Clinical breast examination (CBE) every 6-12 months is recommended from the age of 25 years or 10 years before the youngest BC	
	Annual screening MRI (days 7-15 of menstrual cycle) should be commenced from age 25 years with the addition of annual mammography from age 30 years	
	OC screening:	
	Concurrent transvaginal ultrasound (preferably days 1-10 of menstrual cycle) and CA-125 (best performed after day 5 of menstrual cycle) every 6 months beginning at age 30 years.	
	Before risk-reducing bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy, 6 monthly transvaginal ultrasound and measures of serum CA-125 may be considered from age 30 years; however, the limited value of these tools as an effective screening measure should be communicated to individuals	
Chemoprevention: Use of tamoxifen may be considered; however, the level of evidence is weak; use tamoxifen only for <i>BRCA2</i> tumors or if the first cancer was estrogen receptor positive		
Surveillance in male previvors:		
There are no proven risk-reducing surgical options for men		
Monthly breast self-examination starting at age 35 years		
Clinical breast examination every 12 months starting at age 35 years		
Prostate cancer screening starting at age 45 years for <i>BRCA2</i> carriers and consideration of prostate screening for <i>BRCA1</i> carriers also at age 45 years		

Question	Recommendation	Level of Recommendation
7. When should poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase inhibitors be used?	Olaparib, niraparib, rucaparib are indicated for maintenance treatment in adults with recurrent epithelial OC who are in complete response (CR) or partial response (PR) after platinum-based chemotherapy (irrespective of <i>BRCA</i> status)	IIA
	In advanced <i>BRCA</i> -mutated OC, olaparib is indicated as a monotherapy in patients treated with 3 or more lines of chemotherapy. Rucaparib is also indicated in this setting after 2 or more lines of chemotherapy	
	In g <i>BRCA</i> -mutated OC, olaparib should be used as maintenance after a CR/PR to first-line chemotherapy and cytoreductive surgery	
	Talazoparib is indicated for adults with deleterious or suspected g <i>BRCA</i> -mutated, human epidermal growth factor receptor 2–negative locally advanced or metastatic BC	

### Levels of Evidence (adapted from the Infectious Diseases Society of America–US Public Health Service Grading System)

- I: Evidence from at least one large randomized controlled trial of good methodologic quality (low potential for bias) or meta-analyses of well-conducted randomized trials without heterogeneity
- II: Small randomized trials or large randomized trials with a suspicion of bias (lower methodologic quality) or meta-analyses of such trials or of trials with demonstrated heterogeneity
- III: Prospective cohort studies
- IV: Retrospective cohort studies or case-control studies
- V: Studies without control group, case reports, and/or expert opinions

### Grades of Recommendation

- A: Strong evidence for efficacy with a substantial clinical benefit, strongly recommended
- B: Strong or moderate evidence for efficacy, but with a limited clinical benefit, generally recommended
- C: Insufficient evidence for efficacy or benefit does not outweigh the risk or the disadvantages (adverse events, costs, etc), optional
- D: Moderate evidence against efficacy or for adverse outcome, generally not recommended
- E: Strong evidence against efficacy or for adverse outcome, never recommended

- c) Annual screening magnetic resonance imaging (MRI; days 7 to 15 of the menstrual cycle) should be commenced from age 25 years with the addition of annual mammography with or without tomosynthesis from age 30 years.<sup>77</sup>
- d) In women younger than age 30 years, breast ultrasonography can be considered if MRI is unavailable.

**OC screening.** For carriers who have not undergone rrBSO, we recommend OC screening. This consists of concurrent transvaginal ultrasound, preferably day 1 to 10 of the menstrual cycle, and CA-125—best performed after day 5 of the menstrual cycle—every 6 months beginning at age 30 years or 5 to 10 years before the earliest age of first diagnosis in the family. Before rrBSO, 6 monthly transvaginal ultrasound and measure of serum CA-125 may be considered from age 30 years; however, the limited value of these tools as effective screening measures should be communicated to individuals.

**Chemoprevention.** Use of tamoxifen may be considered; however, the level of evidence is weak.<sup>78</sup>

**Prevention of other *BRCA*-related cancers.** No evidence-based data exist. *BRCA2* carriers may consider annual skin

and eye examination as screening for melanoma, and annual screening for pancreatic cancer with endoscopic ultrasound or MRI/magnetic resonance cholangiopancreatography. There is no consensus when screening should commence; however, age 50 years or 10 years before the earliest diagnosed case in the family would be reasonable (Table 5).

**Reproductive counseling.** Pathogenic variants in many BC genes, including *BRCA*, are inherited in an autosomal-dominant pattern, meaning that there is a 50% chance that children of *BRCA* carriers will have inherited the cancer predisposition variant. Reproductive counseling of *BRCA* carriers includes education about prenatal diagnosis and assisted reproduction.<sup>19</sup> One option is preimplantation genetic diagnosis, which is used to analyze embryos—obtained by in vitro fertilization—genetically before their transfer into the uterus.

### Management for Patient

**Contralateral prophylactic mastectomy.** Risk-reduction mastectomy is often offered to patients with or without a history of BC who carry a germline genetic mutation that

**TABLE 5.** Management Recommendations for Other Genes Implicated in Hereditary Breast Cancers (level of evidence = V, expert opinion)

Gene	Breast Cancer Risk and Management	Ovarian Cancer Risk and Management	Other Cancers
<i>ATM</i>	Increased risk	Potentially increased risk	Counsel for autosomal-recessive condition in offspring
	Annual mammogram from age 40 years	RRSO, insufficient evidence	
	RRM, insufficient evidence		
<i>BARD1</i>	Potentially increased risk	Unknown	
	RRM, insufficient evidence		
<i>BRIP1</i>	Unknown	Increased risk of ovarian cancer	
	Increased risk of lobular breast cancer	Consider RRSO at age 45-50 years	
	Annual mammogram from age 30 years	No increase	Diffuse gastric cancer
<i>CDH1</i>	RRM, insufficient evidence		
	Increased risk	No increase	Colon
	Annual mammogram from age 40 years		
<i>CHEK2</i>	RRM, insufficient evidence		
	Increased risk	No increase	Colon
	Annual mammogram from age 40 years		
<i>NF1</i>	RRM, insufficient evidence		
	Increased risk	No increase	MPNST, GIST
	Annual mammogram from age 30 years		
<i>NBN</i>	RRM, insufficient evidence		
	Increased risk	unknown	
	Annual mammogram from age 40 years		
<i>MSH2, MLH1, MSH6, PMS2, EPCAM</i>	RRM, insufficient evidence		
	Unknown or insufficient evidence	Increased risk	Colon, uterus
	Increased risk	Unknown	
<i>PALB2</i>	Annual mammogram from age 30 years		
	RRM, insufficient evidence		
	Breast awareness from age 18 years		Endometrial cancer: education and hysterectomy
<i>PTEN</i>	CBE every 6-12 months from 25 years		Annual thyroid USG
	MRI/mammogram from age 30 years or 5-10 years before the earliest case in the family		Colonoscopy every 5 years from age 35 years
	Discuss options of RRM		
<i>RAD51C, RAD51D</i>	Unknown	Increased risk of ovarian cancer	
	Increased risk	Consider RRSO at age 45-50 years	
	Annual mammogram from age 40 years	Increased risk of nonepithelial ovarian cancers	
<i>STK11</i>	RRM, insufficient evidence		
	Annual mammogram from age 40 years		

(Continued on following page)

**TABLE 5.** Management Recommendations for Other Genes Implicated in Hereditary Breast Cancers (level of evidence = V, expert opinion) (Continued)

Gene	Breast Cancer Risk and Management	Ovarian Cancer Risk and Management	Other Cancers
<i>TP53</i>	Breast awareness from age 18 years CBE every 6-12 months from age 25 years Age 20-29 years: annual MRI + contrast Age 30-75 years: annual MRI + mammogram RRM to be discussed		Annual whole-body MRI Annual brain MRI Colonoscopy and UGIE every 2-5 years starting at age 25 years Comprehensive physical and neurologic examination Follow Toronto protocol

Abbreviations: CBE, clinical breast examination; GIST, GI stromal tumor; MPNST, malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumor; MRI, magnetic resonance imaging; RRM, risk-reduction mastectomy; RRSO, risk-reducing salpingo-oophorectomy; UGIE, upper GI endoscopy; USG, ultrasonography.

**TABLE 6.** Results From Select Phase II and III Study of PARPi in Patients With Advanced Breast or Ovarian Cancer and *BRCA1/2* Mutations

Study Treatment	Condition	Efficacy Findings
Olaparib monotherapy (300 mg twice per day) v standard single-agent therapy <sup>94</sup> (OLYMPIAD)	Metastatic breast cancer and a germline <i>BRCAm</i>	ORR: 60% (olaparib) v 29% (standard therapy); median PFS, 7.0 months (olaparib) v 4.2 months (standard therapy); HR, 0.58; 95% CI, 0.43 to 0.80; <i>P</i> < .001; DOR, 6.4 months (IQR, 2.8-9.7 months; olaparib) v 7.1 months (IQR, 3.2-12.2 months; standard therapy)
Olaparib monotherapy (200 mg twice per day) v matching placebo <sup>95</sup> (SOLO 2)	Platinum-sensitive, relapsed high-grade serous OC with <i>BRCA1/2m</i>	Median PFS, 19.1 months (olaparib) v 5.5 months (placebo); HR, 0.30; 95% CI, 0.22 to 0.41; <i>P</i> < .0001
Niraparib monotherapy (300 mg) v placebo <sup>96</sup> (NOVA)	Older patients (age ≥ 70 years) with recurrent OC	In gBRCAm subgroup: median PFS was not reached v 3.7 months (in placebo)
Talazoparib monotherapy (1 mg every day) v standard single-agent therapy <sup>87</sup> (EMBRACA)	Advanced BC and g <i>BRCA1/2m</i>	Median PFS, 8.6 months (talazoparib) v 5.6 months (standard therapy); HR, 0.54; 95% CI, 0.41 to 0.71; <i>P</i> < .001; ORR, 62.6% (talazoparib) v 27.2% (standard therapy)
Rucaparib monotherapy (600 mg BID) <sup>97</sup> (ARIEL2)	High-grade ovarian carcinoma and a g/ <i>sBRCA1/2m</i>	ORR, 53.8%; CR, 8.5%; PR, 45.3%; DOR, 9.2 months (95% CI, 6.6 months to 11.6 months)
Olaparib monotherapy (300 mg) v placebo (SOLO 1) <sup>98</sup>	High-grade serous or endometrioid OC, primary peritoneal cancer, or fallopian tube cancer	PFS at 3 years: 60% (olaparib) v 27% (placebo); HR, 0.30; 95% CI, 0.23 to 0.41; <i>P</i> < .001

Abbreviations: CR, complete response; DOR, duration of response; HR, hazard ratio; IQR, interquartile range; OC, ovarian cancer; ORR, objective response rate; PARPi, poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase inhibitor; PFS, progression-free survival; PR, partial response.

confers a high risk for BC *BRCA1/2*, *TP53*, *PTEN*, *CDH1*, or *STK11* mutation.<sup>79-82</sup>

**rrBSO.** Recommendations are the same as those for pre-invasors. There are conflicting data whether rrBSO reduces the risk of BC, with many recent studies not showing any association between rrBSO and BC risk.<sup>83-85</sup> Larger studies are needed to validate these results.

**Advanced OC with BRCA mutation.** Prophylactic bilateral mastectomy is not considered in these cases as the risk of death from the primary malignancy is high over the next 5 years.

### Medical Implications of BRCA in BC

Olaparib is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration for patients with germline *BRCA* mutations and human epidermal growth factor receptor 2–negative BC previously

treated with chemotherapy in the neoadjuvant, adjuvant, or metastatic disease setting on the basis of the Olympiad trial.<sup>86</sup>

Talazoparib is US Food and Drug Administration approved for patients with germline *BRCA* mutations and human epidermal growth factor receptor 2–negative locally advanced or metastatic BC on the basis of the EMBRACA trial.<sup>87</sup>

Neoadjuvant platinum agents: Based on the GeparSixto and CALGB 40603 studies, platinum agents as neoadjuvant treatment improves pathological complete response in *BRCA*-positive patients. Improvement in disease-free survival was demonstrated in GeparSixto, but not in the CALGB trial.<sup>88,89</sup>

### Medical Implications of BRCA in OC

Olaparib, rucaparib, and niraparib have all been approved in OC for various indications (Table 6).

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recommendation for its use, but is a guidance for clinicians in complex decision making. The contributors to this document are acutely aware of the constant and continuous addition to the knowledge on the subject and in the field and the need for regular updates to this document and the fact that this needs to be living document requiring regular modification and revision.

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