

# Should You Consider Cancer Genetics Testing and Counseling?

Learn More at Upcoming Lunch and Learn Seminar

The billions of microscopic living cells inside your body each contain about 25,000 to 35,000 even smaller structures called genes. Those genes carry the information that determines the physical traits you inherit from your parents. Your straight hair, your long legs, your freckled face - even the dimples that appear whenever you smile - all have been passed along through generations of your family through the genes.

Unfortunately, your genes can also carry more sinister traits, including an inherited risk for various forms of cancer.

"The vast majority of cancers are not due primarily to an inherited genetic risk," says Nicolette ("Nicki") Chun, MS, CGC. "Nevertheless, in certain families, errors in the genes



Genetic testing allows patients who know they have an inherited cancer risk to pass helpful information along to other family members who may also be at risk. Learn about the tests that assess your risk for breast, ovarian and colon cancer at the upcoming Washington Women's Center Lunch and Learn lecture on Tuesday, April 6. The class will take place from Noon to 1 p.m. at the Women's Center Conference Room located at 2500 Mowry Avenue (Washington West) in Fremont. Register online at [www.whhs.com](http://www.whhs.com)

called mutations can result in a high predisposition toward developing specific types of cancer."

A certified genetic counselor, Chun evaluates and counsels patients regarding genetic risks for cancer as part of a collaborative effort between Washington Hospital's Cancer Genetics Program and the Cancer Genetics Clinic at Stanford University Medical Center.

To help people in the local community learn more about genetic testing and counseling, the Washington Women's Center will be offering a special "Lunch and Learn" class featuring Chun and medical oncologist Vandana Sharma, M.D., Medical Director of the Washington Cancer Genetics Program. The class is scheduled for Tuesday, April 6 from noon to 1 p.m. in the Washington Women's Center Conference Room at 2500 Mowry Avenue in Fremont.

According to Chun, the most likely candidates for inherited cancer risks are people who have a family history of:

- specific cancers repeated in multiple generations,
- a combination of related cancers such as breast and ovarian cancer or colon and uterine cancer, and
- younger ages at the time of cancer diagnosis.

"There are a few dozen cancer-related gene mutations for which we can do testing, but the two most common are breast-ovarian cancer syndrome and Lynch syndrome," Chun explains. "Breast-ovarian cancer syndrome is often related to mutations on the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. Lynch syndrome involves a genetic mutation in one of five genes and is the most common inherited risk factor for colon cancer. Lynch syndrome also increases the chances of developing uterine and ovarian cancers in women, as well as stomach, bile duct and urinary tract cancers."

Chun notes that having a particular gene mutation increases the person's risk for cancer, but it does not automatically mean the person will develop cancer. "For example, if we find mutations on the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes, that means the person has up to a 65 percent lifetime risk of developing breast cancer," she says. "Also, women who've had this type of breast cancer once are up to 50 percent more likely to develop a new primary breast cancer."

Genetic testing for inherited cancer risks faces some limitations. "We don't have comprehensive tests available for all inherited cancer risks," Chun cautions. "For example, we're not as far along with tests for prostate cancer and other types of cancer such as lung cancer and brain tumors. Also, if we test a person for mutations on the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes and get a negative result, that test would not be helpful for any of their relatives in determining their risks for breast cancer. We know there are other breast cancer genes that we can test for yet."

For patients who do test positive for a cancer-related genetic mutation, that knowledge can help them and their physicians take preventive measures to lower their risk factors. "Patients who know they have an inherited cancer risk may benefit from more frequent screenings, surgery or preventive chemotherapy," Chun says. "It's also helpful to be able to pass that information along to other family members who may also be at risk."

## Learn More About Genetic Testing

To register for the class on April 6, please visit [www.whhs.com](http://www.whhs.com) and click on the link for "Genetic Counseling and Testing" under Upcoming Seminars. For more information about the Washington Cancer Genetics Program, visit [www.whhs.com/cancergenetics](http://www.whhs.com/cancergenetics)

# News Article Prompts Man to Seek Urgent Medical Care for Wife

Carol Mahmood had been sick for a couple of weeks with a bacterial respiratory infection. Her regular physician had prescribed antibiotics, but she was growing increasingly tired and weak. She also was experiencing episodes of mental confusion and impaired thinking. Still, she resisted going back to the doctor.

"I was having mood swings, but I thought perhaps they were just anxiety attacks, and I didn't want to seem foolish by going to the doctor for something that wasn't important," Mrs. Mahmood says.

Then one night, when she was feeling particularly exhausted and confused, her husband Syed happened to read an article in the Tri-City Voice newspaper that prompted him to insist that they head to Washington Hospital right away.

"I was just scanning through the paper when the headline 'Diabetes Can Be a Heart-Breaking Disease' caught my eye," Mr. Mahmood recalls.

The article featured an interview with Washington Hospital cardiologist Ash Jain, M.D., explaining the link between diabetes and cardiovascular disease. As part of its commitment to educating the community about various medical conditions and treatments, the hospital contributes a variety of articles to each issue of the weekly newspaper.

"The first sentence of the article was very striking, noting the high rate of death due to heart and vascular disease among people with diabetes," Mr. Mahmood explains. "Carol, who is now 59, has known since she was 35 that she has diabetes, and she was experiencing many of the symptoms described in the article, including shortness of breath, weakness and extreme fatigue. The article triggered my sixth sense that something was seriously wrong."

Despite his wife's initial resistance, Mr. Mahmood drove his wife to the hospital.

"In the car, I was totally exhausted and I began to lose my ability to sit up straight," Mrs.

Mahmood notes. "When we got to the Emergency Room, I just sort of fell out of the car onto the pavement, and the attendants lifted me into a wheelchair and brought me in right away."

Mr. Mahmood adds, "When she fell on the ground, I was worried about the possibility that she was having a stroke, since the article talked about the dangers of strokes in people with diabetes. She was completely 'out of it.' She had no strength, and she was incoherent."

Fortunately, Mrs. Mahmood was not suffering a heart attack or stroke. The medical team quickly

her pneumonia and bronchitis, the staff closely monitored her blood sugar levels, using insulin injections rather than oral medications to manage her blood sugar more precisely.

"Everyone at Washington Hospital treated me very well," she says. "It is an excellent hospital. I loved the quality of care they provided. The doctors, nurses, kitchen staff - everyone, in fact - all try to make you comfortable and happy. Dr. Ali's prompt attention and ongoing care for the entire two weeks was remarkable."

While his wife was in the hospital, Mr. Mahmood saw Dr. Jain in the hallway one day. "I recognized Dr. Jain from his photo in the newspaper and approached him," Mr. Mahmood says. "I told him I was grateful to him because that newspaper article really saved my wife's life."

Now recovering at home, Mrs. Mahmood celebrated her 37th anniversary with her husband on St. Patrick's Day, March 17. The couple observed the occasion with a quiet dinner at home, enjoying each other's company.

"After 37 years, I really don't want to lose my wife, and that was my fear at the time when I was racing her to the hospital," Mr. Mahmood comments. "After this experience, we have an even greater appreciation for each other. And now I read the newspaper articles from Washington Hospital faithfully every week."



A January article in the Tri-City Voice explaining the link between diabetes and cardiovascular disease helped trigger Syed Mahmood to take his seriously ill wife to the Washington Hospital emergency room. After being treated for several weeks, Carol Mahmood is now recovering from home.

diagnosed her with double pneumonia and bronchitis. An extremely low blood sugar level accounted for the exhaustion and disorientation. In extreme cases, drastically low blood sugar levels can result in a coma - and even death.

"While I was ill, I hadn't been eating properly," Mrs. Mahmood explains. "Nevertheless, I had continued to take my diabetes medication, not realizing that the medication was lowering my blood sugar to dangerously low levels."

Under the care of her attending physician, Zulfiqar Ali, M.D., Mrs. Mahmood spent two weeks at the hospital, including several days in the Intensive Care Unit. In addition to treating

## Share Your Story With Us

Washington Hospital is committed to improving the health of our patients and neighbors. By offering a wide array of programs, classes and services to the community free-of-charge, Washington Hospital continues to strive to meet the health care needs of our District residents. Educating our community is a top priority and sharing real life success stories in the Tri-City Voice is just one of the many ways that we can make a difference. If you have a story you would like to share with us, please contact our Community Relations Department at (510) 791-3417.

# HEALTH & WELLNESS



## WASHINGTON HOSPITAL HEALTHCARE SYSTEM COMMUNITY EDUCATION CLASSES

### HEALTH & WELLNESS



#### Treating Hip Pain That Affect Young and Middle Aged Adults

Do you suffer from pain or discomfort in your hip? A physician specializing in orthopedic surgery will discuss new treatment strategies for those who suffer from pain or discomfort in your hip.

**Date/Time:** Monday, April 12  
Noon to 1:30 p.m.  
**Speaker:** Russell M. Nord, M.D., Orthopedic Surgeon  
**Location:** Conrad E. Anderson, M.D. Auditorium, Rooms A & B

#### Are You At Risk for Diabetes? Learn the Signs

At this seminar, you will learn about diabetes, its causes, symptoms and when to see a doctor. A registered nurse specializing in diabetes education will present this lecture.

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, April 13  
1 to 2:30 p.m.  
**Speaker:** Vida Reed, R.N., Certified Diabetes Educator  
**Location:** Conrad E. Anderson M.D. Auditorium, Rooms A & B

#### Do You Need Your Health Insurance Questions Answered?

If you want to receive information about your health insurance and have questions, this is the seminar for you. A health insurance expert will present this lecture.

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, April 14  
10 a.m. to Noon  
**Speaker:** Linda Dawal, Washington Hospital Health Insurance Information Service Coordinator  
**Location:** Conrad E. Anderson, M.D. Auditorium, Room C

#### Heel Problems and Treatment Options

Do you suffer from pain and discomfort in your heel? A physician specializing in podiatry will talk about how to treat heel conditions.

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, April 27  
1 to 2:30 p.m.  
**Speaker:** Warren M. Johnson, Podiatrist  
**Location:** Conrad E. Anderson, M.D. Auditorium  
Rooms A, B & C

### COMMUNITY EVENTS

#### Let's Go Green Together!

Come join Washington Hospital and other Tri-City organizations as we celebrate Earth Day and roll up our sleeves to make our community a greener place to live. Visit our Farmer's Market, recycle unwanted items and learn new ways to go green.



**Date/Time:** Saturday, April 17  
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
**Location:** Conrad E. Anderson, M.D. Auditorium and Washington West Parking Lot

### WOMEN'S HEALTH

#### Genetic Counseling and Testing

Learn about the tests that assess your risk for breast, ovarian and colon cancer. Should you consider genetic counseling and testing?

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, April 6, Noon to 1 p.m.  
**Speakers:** Vandana Sharma, M.D., Oncologist  
Nicolette Chun, MSN, Genetics Counselor  
**Location:** Washington Women's Center Conference Room, 2500 Mowry Avenue, (Washington West) in Fremont

### STROKE EDUCATION SERIES



#### Acute Management of Stroke & Chronic Care and Stroke Rehabilitation

Stroke is the third leading cause of death and the leading cause of long-term disability, yet stroke

is preventable. You will learn prevention, warning signs, symptoms and care after having a stroke.

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, April 6, 6 to 8 p.m.  
**Speakers:** Ash Jain, M.D., Cardiologist, and Doug Van Houten, R.N.  
**Location:** Conrad E. Anderson, M.D. Auditorium



**Washington Hospital Healthcare System**  
Investing in the health of the community.

To register, please visit [www.whhs.com](http://www.whhs.com). For more information, call (800) 963-7070.