

Cancer Testing: A Promising Method

Ross Simpson:

What if finding cancer in people was as simple as a blood test? An existing test just gives a cell count; it doesn't capture whole cells that doctors can analyze to choose treatments. Now, health-care giant Johnson & Johnson is putting its corporate weight behind a Massachusetts General Hospital test that is far more detailed.

Minetta Liu:

We all recognize that, uh, the current tools that we have are not that exact, and no matter what we try to do to predict how someone may do, um, we're not always right. So we're all clamoring for tools that'll help us to improve identifying patients who need treatment or can finish treatment earlier. Or do we need to be more aggressive in treatment? Or is this never gonna come back?

Ross Simpson:

The new test could enable doctors to quickly tell if treatments are working for the patients: a process that can now take a couple of months using CT scans. Mass General is monitoring patients without painful biopsies.

Robert McCormack:

It can be done using a simple tube of blood. Most patients who have metastatic cancer are either treated based on characteristics of their primary tumor, which may have been taken ten, fifteen years earlier, or they try and do a biopsy, which is not always successful.

Ross Simpson:

Veridex, a subsidiary of J&J, says this method is the most promising of several dozen that companies and universities are rushing to develop in order to capture circulating tumor cells. Ultimately, the test may offer a way to screen for cancers, besides the mammograms, colonoscopies, and other less-than-ideal methods used now.

Otis Brawley:

We are hopeful, uh, but we want to be cautionary. There are some things about this research that are really groundbreaking and could be incredibly helpful, but they need to be evaluated cautiously and in a scientific way.

Ross Simpson:

Four cancer centers will start using the test this year to help evaluate its effectiveness.

Ross Simpson:

Ross Simpson, The Associated Press.

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