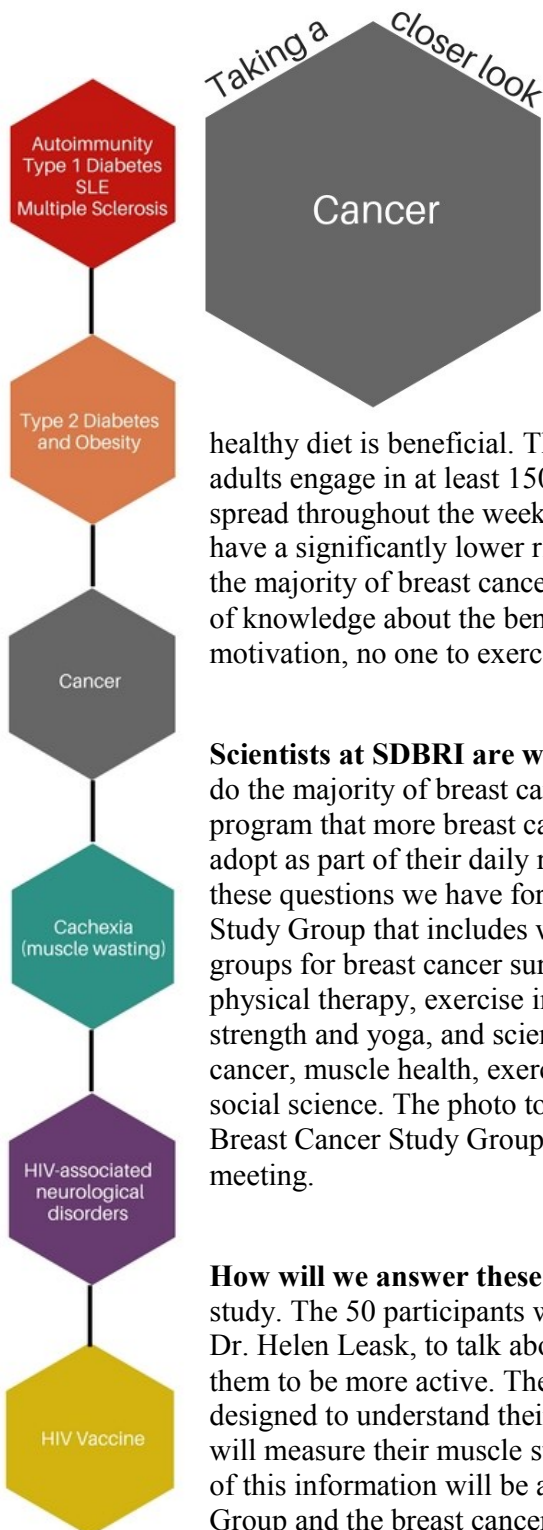


The Bench and Beyond



Community Research Collaborations are projects that are conducted jointly by trained research scientists and members of the community. People who are not research scientists nor health care workers often have interesting ideas about how to improve their health and the health of their family and friends. Community experience and insight can lead to important research that might ultimately benefit hundreds of thousands of people, or more. At SDBRI, we collaborate with members of the community to test new ideas that are specifically aimed at benefiting people with cancer.

It is generally accepted that staying in shape through exercise and a healthy diet is beneficial. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that adults engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity spread throughout the week. Women who exercise regularly after being diagnosed with breast cancer have a significantly lower risk of breast cancer recurrence than those who do not exercise; however, the majority of breast cancer survivors don't exercise. There are many reasons for this including, lack of knowledge about the benefits of exercise, not enough time, not feeling well enough, lack of motivation, no one to exercise with, and more.

Scientists at SDBRI are working with several community groups to address the questions “Why do the majority of breast cancer survivors not exercise?” and “Is it possible to design an exercise program that more breast cancer survivors will adopt as part of their daily routine?” To answer these questions we have formed a Breast Cancer Study Group that includes women who run support groups for breast cancer survivors, experts in physical therapy, exercise instructors in muscle strength and yoga, and scientists who specialize in cancer, muscle health, exercise, clinical trials and social science. The photo to the right features our Breast Cancer Study Group at our January 2019 meeting.



How will we answer these questions? We will recruit 50 breast cancer survivors to take part in the study. The 50 participants will take part in 5 discussion groups, led by SDBRI social studies expert Dr. Helen Leask, to talk about their various barriers to exercise and the things that might encourage them to be more active. The same women will also complete standard questionnaires that are designed to understand their challenges and motivators to exercise, and Dr. Joanna Davies' group will measure their muscle strength to test whether muscle weakness is linked to lack of exercise. All of this information will be analyzed by Drs. Leask and Davies and used by our Breast Cancer Study Group and the breast cancer survivors themselves to design an exercise program that is feasible, safe, and likely to increase the number of breast cancer survivors who exercise regularly.

Frequently Asked Questions!

How will we know if our new exercise program works? In a follow up study we will teach local support groups leaders on how to instruct breast cancer survivors on following our exercise program. To reach a wider audience we will develop an app for the phone or other portable devices that guides the participants through the program. Participants will be encouraged to sign onto the app every time they use the exercise program so that we can monitor frequency of use. In addition, support group leaders will monitor the frequency and level of exercise that members of their group achieve. At 3 months, 6 months and 1 year after the exercise program is launched, we will review support group and app participation in the program and compare to participation in other similar programs.

Do our community collaborators actually work in the lab? Community members do not work in the lab but we invite all of our non-scientist collaborators to spend a Saturday morning with us learning how to isolate DNA, run electrophoresis gels and identify different types of human blood cells using a microscope. The photo to the right shows two members of our Breast Cancer Study Group having fun in the lab last June (2018).



Which organizations fund community research collaborations? It depends on the type of research. For breast cancer research, the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health, and the California Breast Cancer Research Program (CBCRP) provide funding for community based collaborative research.




Do you have a question related to health, that you think can be answered by collaborating with scientists? Do you have ideas about how your question might be addressed? If yes, you might consider contacting local biomedical research teams to see if they would be interested in working with you.

Location

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