

Supporting
Australians
for 15 years

Breast
Cancer
Network
Australia



15 July 2016

Professor Robyn Ward
Chair, Medical Services Advisory Committee
Department of Health and Ageing
MDP 851
GPO Box 9848
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Professor Ward

Re: 1342.3 – Oncotype DX breast cancer assay

On behalf of Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA), I write to advise of our continued support for a Medicare rebate for the Oncotype DX breast cancer assay to quantify the risk of disease recurrence and predict adjuvant chemotherapy benefit for women with breast cancer (Oncotype DX).

BCNA is the peak national consumer organisation for Australians affected by breast cancer and consists of a network of more than 115,000 individual members and 300 Member Groups across Australia.

In July 2013, BCNA provided a submission to MSAC in support of the initial application for Oncotype DX (application 1342). I attach a copy of that submission for your reference.

In the three years since, BCNA has continued to receive enquiries from women newly diagnosed with breast cancer about access to the Oncotype DX test. The cost, which has varied from \$4,000 to \$5,100 depending on the value of the Australian dollar, is prohibitive for some women.

There is no doubt this test should be available in Australia as it is in the UK and the USA. It would actually save "the system" thousands of dollars plus it gives us a choice if we are suitable for the test. I don't think anybody would go through chemotherapy if they didn't have to. I have just paid \$4,050 to have this test done in the USA and will now await the results. Either way for me it was money well spent despite having to pay by credit card to be able to afford it. It will help both myself and my oncologist decide what treatment will benefit me the greatest. – Jan

I was told by my sister-in-law that this [Oncotype DX] is offered free to everyone before undergoing chemotherapy in the UK. Apparently the government ends up saving lots of money on the chemo that they don't need to give. It makes sense. Hopefully it won't be too long before we are given that option here. The cost definitely prohibits many from having this test. – Gilly

Oncotype DX can provide important information to assist women with certain types of early breast cancer and their clinicians to make a decision on whether chemotherapy treatment is appropriate for them. Chemotherapy is a highly toxic treatment with considerable adverse side effects, including nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea, mouth ulcers, hair loss, early menopause, fatigue, peripheral neuropathy and neutropenia. It can cause premature and sometimes permanent infertility, a devastating outcome particularly for young women who may wish to have a family in the future.

Being able to access information that may help to make a decision on the potential benefit or otherwise of chemotherapy is therefore highly valuable to women and their families. There are also benefits for the Australian Government and taxpayers through cost savings to the health budget where decisions are made not to proceed with chemotherapy treatment.

My results came back that chemo would be little to no benefit to me, so I am now waiting to start six weeks of radiotherapy in early April. Apparently there are a lot of women out there who are like me and their cancer falls in that gray area for treatment options. I really wish this test was more accessible to everyone. I am so glad I got this test done to clarify my treatment options and, even though I haven't started my radiotherapy, I can at least see the light at the end of the tunnel. – Myra

I have just had my Oncotype DX result. It came back with a very LOW score, meaning that I would probably not benefit from having intensive chemotherapy!!!! That is the BEST news I have had for ages. The oncologist said she was very apprehensive about giving me chemo after getting news on Monday that I have a second brain aneurysm. The Oncotype test has helped her to make an informed decision on my future intervention which I believe will now be hormone blocking tablets. Today I am doing a happy dance around the house! – Jan

BCNA supports an equitable and affordable health system where all women who can benefit from a test, procedure or treatment can access it. This is currently not the situation with Oncotype DX, where only those women who can afford to pay the several thousands of dollars for it can access it. We believe Oncotype DX can play an important role in treatment decision-making for some women and should be affordable to all women who can benefit from it.

Should you have any concerns or questions related to this comment, please contact me at kwells@bcna.org.au or (03) 9805 2562.

Yours sincerely



Kathy Wells
Head of Policy, Research and Advocacy