

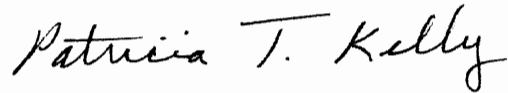
To the Editor:

To put Marin breast cancer rates in perspective (“Cancer Connection”, February 26-March 4), the following information may be useful:

- The reported increases are provisional since they are based on population estimates derived from California Department of Finance data and may well change when the more accurate 2000 census figures are used.
- The 20% increase in Marin breast cancer risk from 1998 to 1999 is a comparison. This same increase in actual numbers is 39 women in 100,000 or 0.04%! As this example shows, per cent increases can be misleading since they do not provide information about actual size.
- Two large randomized prospective studies have now shown *NO statistically significant increase in breast cancer risk to women who used Prempro*, a type of hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Without a statistically significant difference, these studies have failed to show that HRT is a likely cause for the small differences found.
- In the Women’s Health Initiative study, the often quoted 26% increase in breast cancer risk to HRT users is, in actual numbers, 8 in 10,000 a year or 0.08%. Even this small difference is unlikely to be due to HRT use since the study followed women for an average of 5.2 years and it takes seven to twelve years for a small breast cancer to be detected. Therefore, all of the breast cancers reported in this study were probably present in an undetected state when the study began.

To make progress in finding the causes of breast cancer we must look beyond HRT use and minor risk factors such as reproductive history. Meanwhile, information about the actual size of a risk will provide perspective on its relevance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia T. Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

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More information about breast cancer risk and Dr. Kelly's book, *Assess Your True Risk of Breast Cancer*, can be found on her web site: www.ptkelly.com.