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DRAFT FOR CLIENT REVIEW

***New Research Indicates that African American Women Should Seek Genetic Screening for BRCA Breast Cancer Gene***

***“Breast cancer-gene” research pioneer, Dr. Mary-Claire King, to speak at Morehouse School of Medicine on how screening for inherited breast cancer can lower risk among African American women***

African American women are more often diagnosed with aggressive, late-stage breast cancers—resulting in mortality rates that are 44% higher than for Caucasian women. Now, leading medical researchers, including University of Washington geneticist and Lasker Laureate Dr. Mary-Claire King, recommend that early genetic screenings for all women can save lives.

Dr. King will make a free, public address at the Morehouse School of Medicine on Thursday, March 19, to discuss *Inherited Breast Cancer: From Gene Discovery to Public Health*.

Her discovery of the BRCA “breast cancer gene” in 1990 demonstrated the mechanism of inherited cancer, and pointed to the specific gene mutation that could predict vulnerability to the disease. Then just last year, startling new findings indicate that mutations in the BRCA “breast cancer gene” are as likely in women in the general population as they are for those with a family history of breast cancer. Because of this, she urges universal genetic testing for all women over the age 30.

A 2013 [research study](#) at the University of Chicago led by Dr. Olufunmilayo Olopade, Director of The Center for Clinical Cancer Genetics, found that 22 *percent* of the 249 African American women with breast cancer in her study carried inherited genetic mutations. The study also found that African American woman carrying a mutation in BRCA have a 37 to 85 *percent* lifetime risk of developing breast cancer, as compared with 12 *percent* of non-carriers.

While some within the medical community voice caution that this could lead to unnecessary testing for some women, King and Olopade focus on the benefits. “Having the genetic mutation doesn’t mean you’re definitely going to get cancer,” Dr. Olopade [told NPR last September](#). She explained that women at greater risk should get regular MRIs to catch cancer early, and make healthy lifestyle choices to minimize their risk like breast-feeding, eating well and exercising.

Still, within the African American community, access to testing and follow-up care continues to be a challenge. Disparities in availability of accessible and affordable breast cancer screening is a profound public health concern.

Dr. King will appear on March 19 at a special Lasker Lecture, co-sponsored by the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation and the Morehouse School of Medicine. In September 2014, the Lasker Foundation awarded Dr. King their prestigious [Special Achievement Award in Medical Science](#) for her “bold,

imaginative, and diverse contributions to medical science and human rights.” Since then, Dr. King has used the Lasker spotlight to attract attention to the battle against breast cancer.

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**For more information on genetic screening centers in the Atlanta area, please see:**

[Emory Health Care High Risk Clinic](#) Provides comprehensive screening and education for patients at increased risk for breast and ovarian cancer. A genetic counseling visit includes a review of family history, personalized risk assessment and discussion of surveillance and genetic testing options.

[Northside Hospital Cancer Institute](#) Provides in-depth consultation to examine patient’s personal history and education about how sporadic hereditary cancer develops, while exploring patient and family’s risk.

General women’s health providers in Atlanta:

[Planned Parenthood](#)

Offers women’s health services such as breast exams and mammogram referrals.

[The Center for Black Women’s Wellness, Inc. \(CBWW\)](#)

A non-profit organization that provides free and low-cost services to empower black women, and their families, toward physical, mental and economic wellness—offers clinical breast exams and mammogram referrals.