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UK genetic program to do 'Angelina Jolie' type of screening

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Institute of Cancer Research and Illumina's Mainstreaming Cancer Genetics research program to conduct Angelina Jolie'type of cancer gene screening



Singapore: Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) in London, UK, and US-based gene sequencing firm Illumina, have launched a research program that will allow cancer patients to have access to the kind of genetic analysis that Hollywood actor Ms Angelina Jolie undertook prior to her double mastectomy.

The program, called Mainstreaming Cancer Genetics, received funds worth $4 million (2.7 million pound) by the the Wellcome Trust and will use a new Illumina test called TruSight that can analyze 97 cancer predisposition genes within a few weeks for a few hundred pounds. The new model will initially be tested in women with breast or ovarian cancer at London's Royal Marsden hospital.

There are nearly 100 other known cancer predisposition genes. However, in Britain testing for them is currently very restricted. The recent advances in gene sequencing has made screening for gene mutations a faster and cheaper process. This is paving the way for gene testing eventually to become routine for all cancer patients.

Dr Nazneen Rahman, head, genetics, ICR, and one-of-the-project's leader, said that, "What we're trying to do here is develop processes that will allow comprehensive and systematic use of genetic information in cancer medicine so that (more people) will be able to benefit from the types of information and situations we were hearing about last week (with the Jolie story)."

Dr Rahman added, "It is very important to know if a mutation in a person's genetic blueprint has caused their cancer. It allows more personalized treatment, so for example such people are often at risk of getting another cancer and may choose to have more comprehensive surgery, or may need different medicines, or extra monitoring."