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New drug being tested in breast cancer study *Don Finley Express-News Medical Writer*

What researchers describe as a promising new **drug to prevent the recurrence** of breast **cancer** is being **tested** in women in San Antonio and across North America.

In laboratory experiments and in a small, preliminary European study, the **drug** seems **to** work better than existing treatments for the many women who eventually become resistant **to** tamoxifen, the first-line treatment.

Perhaps more significantly, the new **drug**, called Faslodex, appears **to** be more powerful than tamoxifen itself - at least in the test tube, said the San Antonio researcher heading the study.

"It's very early in its development, but based on what we've seen so far, it's a very exciting **drug**," said Dr. C. Kent Osborne, chief of medical oncology at the University of Texas Health Science Center.

Millions of women around the world take tamoxifen both **to prevent** breast **cancer** from returning after surgery and **to treat** breast **cancer** that has spread **to** other parts of the body. These cancers depend on the hormone estrogen **to** grow.

But in many patients, the **cancer** cells become resistant **to** tamoxifen. All women whose **cancer** has spread become resistant, usually within a year or two, Osborne said.

At that point, doctors turn **to** second-line, anti-estrogen drugs such as anastrozole, which was approved last year and is sold under the brand name Arimidex. When women become resistant **to** the second-line drugs, the only alternative is chemotherapy.

In the British study of 19 tamoxifen-resistant breast **cancer** patients, 67 percent saw improvement in their disease, including some complete remissions.

That response, Osborne said, "is much higher than you would expect from other forms of second-line hormonal therapies in breast **cancer** patients.

"I actually have been studying it in my lab for a number of years, comparing it **to** other forms of hormonal therapy like tamoxifen, and in our experimental models, it's much better than tamoxifen," he said.

Between 600 and 800 post-menopausal women with tamoxifen-resistant metastatic breast **cancer** will participate in the study at about 50 medical centers in the United States and Canada.

The study first will compare Faslodex **to** anastrozole. If it does well, it will be studied against tamoxifen, Osborne said.

For information about the study, call 616-5798.

In an unusual footnote, Zeneca Pharmaceuticals, a British company sponsoring the study, owns all three drugs - tamoxifen, anastrozole and Faslodex.