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An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of how individuals who may have concerns about a family history of breast cancer make sense of genetic information.

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The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of how individuals who may have concerns about a family history of breast cancer make sense of genetic information before they have come into contact with any specialist services.

Genetic causes of breast cancer are increasingly being identified and reported in the media, with genetic information becoming more readily available via the internet. It is estimated that of the approximately 45,000 women and 300 men diagnosed with breast cancer in the UK each year, 3% of women and 10-20% of men are caused by genetically inherited mutations (Cancer Research UK 2012). This means that the breast cancer genetic mutation has been passed from either parent to their children, with other family members also being at risk of having this genetic mutation.

Identifying the genetic status of all the family can be important to individuals so that they can make sense of their risk and need for surveillance, and consider genetic testing, monitoring, treatment and surgical strategies. It is therefore considered important for individuals to have some understanding of genetics when making sense of their own and family genetic health and disease status. The Cancer Strategy (DH 2011) indicates the importance of public awareness and the early detection of cancer.

It is recognised that genetics is a complex subject and that many individuals have difficulties in making sense of the subject and also in considering this in relation to their own health status (DH 2003; Samerski 2006; Burke et al. 2007). There is a wealth of information available regarding breast cancer; however the literature is limited regarding the knowledge and understanding of genetics in the general population, what individuals want to know about genetics, and how it should be presented. This research is exploring individuals understanding of genetic issues in the context of hereditary breast cancer so that we can fully consider their lived experience and to identify their preferences for types and sources of genetic information.

The research is a qualitative study, has utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews with ten individuals recruited from the general population and has adopted an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to the data analysis (Smith et al. 2009). Findings from this study will be disseminated via this presentation, including 'facing the reality', 'relationships', 'nothing I can do' and 'taking action'. Dissemination of the findings aims to influence future health education materials.