

They're here ...



BRANDON BOLLOM/THE BATTALION

Thad Williams, a senior wildlife ecology major, pets one of the two penguins, Penny and Pete, from Sea World of Texas, in the basement of Reed McDonald Friday morning. The penguins toured Texas to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Sea World in Texas.

Study may lift hopes for breast cancer prevention

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A new study shows that a drug used for years to treat breast cancer patients also may prevent the disease from occurring, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported Sunday.

The National Cancer Institute, a federal agency that coordinates the nation's cancer programs, said its six-year study was the first ever to show that a drug can reduce the incidence of breast cancer.

The study showed that the drug tamoxifen cut cancer rates by nearly half among women who were considered at risk of getting the disease.

The institute recently mailed letters announcing the breakthrough to the 13,000 women in the United States and Canada who participated in the study, the newspaper reported.

"This is now the first study in the world to show that a drug can reduce the incidence of breast cancer," the letter stated.

The results of the study — one of the largest cancer prevention trials ever undertaken — are to be made public Wednesday. Researchers would not discuss the results with the newspaper.

"I'm just thrilled. Wow!" Patricia Lorah, 45, of Reading, told the *Inquirer* on Saturday after receiving her letter. "My mother and grandmother died of breast cancer. This is almost overwhelming."

Women at risk of getting the disease because of family history, precancerous breast lesions or age were randomly assigned to five years on either a placebo pill or tamoxifen.

The drug, made by Wilmington, Del.-based Zeneca Pharmaceuticals, is widely used to prevent the spread or return of breast cancer.

According to the institute, the drug reduced the rate of expected breast cancers from 1 in 130 women to 1 in 236 during the study, the *Inquirer* reported.

However, tamoxifen also has been associated with increased risks for cancer in the uterine lining and for blood clots in the lungs.

Those risks prompted The National Women's

Health Network in Washington to study.

"If this turns out to be a good risk for some women, that will be good," Cindy Pearson, executive director of the Women's Health Network.

But it is "imperative for researchers to know what ... they know about the benefit. Did any women die of anything but tamoxifen?"

Tamoxifen slips into estrogen receptors on breast cancer cells and blocks them, preventing the cells from growing and dividing.

In 1994, the trial was temporarily suspended because of a congressional hearing about four uterine cancer deaths.

Another study of breast cancer treatment using tamoxifen, University of Pittsburgh surgeon Bernard Fisher, director of the program, also was investigating reports that he was addressing research problems.

That did not mean women from staying in the study.

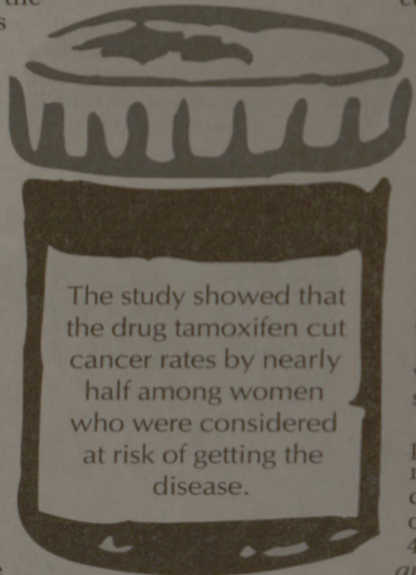
"I never considered dropping out. My thought was more like, 'Maybe I'll change my child's life and my other people's,'" Fisher, 49, of Newtown, Pa., told the *Inquirer*.

The participants will be followed for at least two more years.

Researchers still are analyzing the data and making recommendations for using tamoxifen. Final recommendations are still being developed, according to the letter.

The women now can go to the 270 meetings participating in the study to find out whether they were taking tamoxifen or the placebo.

"I'm hoping I was on tamoxifen, but I'm in the placebo arm. I am going to ask my physician if I should stay on tamoxifen because I really believe in it," Wilson, 48, of North Wales, told the *Inquirer*.



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