



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**AURORA, the first international molecular screening programme for metastatic breast cancer, presented at IMPAKT Breast Cancer Conference**

**By Breast International Group (BIG)**

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***For immediate release***

**Brussels, Belgium** – *AURORA is the first international research programme of its kind aiming to improve the lives of patients with metastatic breast cancer. Recently launched by the Breast International Group (BIG), it will be presented by Martine Piccart-Gebhart at the IMPAKT Breast Cancer Conference on Saturday, 10 May during a session devoted to new drugs and trials.*

While research has made great strides in recent decades to improve and significantly extend the lives of patients with early breast cancer, the needs of patients with advanced or metastatic disease have largely been ignored. Moreover, despite the fact that the overall breast cancer death rate has dropped steadily over the last decade and significant improvements in survival have been made, metastatic breast cancer represents the leading cause of death among patients with the disease.

In this context the Breast International Group (BIG) recently launched AURORA, which will use molecular screening to improve our understanding of metastatic breast cancer and its response or lack of response to available drug therapies. In total 1300 women and men from about 60 hospitals in 15 European countries are expected to take part in the programme. Over time, BIG hopes to expand the programme well beyond Europe to involve several 1000 more patients.

Dr Martine Piccart-Gebhart, Chair of BIG and Director of the Medicine Department of the Institut Jules Bordet, strongly believes in this research programme and says: "It is almost unethical that we continue to treat women with metastatic breast cancer when we have so little knowledge of their disease. We now have powerful technologies for investigating the molecular landscape of tumours, and we have an obligation to women to establish AURORA as a large translational research effort that can hopefully lead to more effective treatments in the future".

Within AURORA, metastatic and primary breast cancer tissue specimens will be collected and screened with a panel of more than 400 cancer-related genes for the first time on a large scale. Plasma and blood samples will also be collected, and any samples not analysed immediately will be

stored in an independent bio-repository to enable future research. An innovative bioinformatics platform has been developed to support the collection of AURORA data. These data are being collected in a way that will allow sharing and collaborating in the context of other initiatives started by researchers in North America.

AURORA will enable scientists to understand both why breast cancer metastasises and why some patients respond poorly to standard treatment, while others respond very well. Whenever possible, patients participating in AURORA will be offered to participate in a clinical trial testing new and promising drugs that target the specific genetic characteristics of their tumours. The ultimate hope is that AURORA will benefit patients by leading us to both better treatments and to finding cures for the women and men affected by this disease.

AURORA is made possible in part by generous grants from the Breast Cancer Research Foundation (BCRF), the Fondation Cancer (Luxembourg), the National Lottery (Belgium), NIF Trust, and individual donors.

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#### **About Breast International Group (BIG)**

The Breast International Group (BIG) is a non-profit organisation for academic breast cancer research groups from around the world, with its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Founded by leading European opinion leaders in 1999, BIG now constitutes a network of 49 collaborative groups based in Europe, Canada, Latin America, Asia and Australasia. These entities are tied to several thousand specialised hospitals and research centres worldwide. About 30 clinical trials are run or are under development under the BIG umbrella at any one time. BIG also works closely with the US National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the North American Breast Cancer Group (NABCG), so that together they act as a strong integrating force in the breast cancer research arena.

BIG facilitates and accelerates international breast cancer research by stimulating cooperation between its members and other academic networks, and collaborating with, but working independently from, the pharmaceutical industry. Large-scale cooperation is crucial to make significant advances in breast cancer research, reduce unnecessary duplication of effort, and optimally serve those affected by the disease.

[www.BIGagainstbreastcancer.org](http://www.BIGagainstbreastcancer.org)

#### **About Martine Piccart-Gebhart**

Martine Piccart-Gebhart, MD, PhD is Professor of Oncology at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Director of the Medicine Department at the Institut Jules Bordet, Belgium. She is also co-founder and chair of the Breast International Group.

Dr Piccart-Gebhart is a member of numerous professional organisations, currently serving as President of the European CanCer Organisation (ECCO). She is immediate Past-President of the

European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO). From 2006 to 2009 she served as President of the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) and member of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) board.

She has served as first author or co-author of about 400 scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals. She has received numerous awards in recognition of her achievements in the clinical research field, including the Jill Rose Award (New York), the William L. McGuire Award (San Antonio), the Umberto Veronesi Award for the Future Fight against Cancer (Cancun) and, recently, ASCO's David A. Karnofsky Memorial Award (Chicago).

### **About IMPAKT Breast Cancer Conference**



Jointly organised by BIG and the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO), the sixth edition of the IMPAKT Breast Cancer Conference will figure out how to best develop and better individualise new strategies to fight against breast cancer, putting current and future issues into perspective. In recent years, translational research in breast cancer has evolved at such a fast pace that it has made all believe that our dream of truly personalised medicine in breast cancer might soon become a reality. However, despite some advances, there are still many research goals to be achieved. Having laboratory discoveries translated into clinical practice is what patients need, but it is equally important that data collected in the clinic get back to researchers to allow them to dig more deeply into the biological behaviour of the disease. Around 450 attendees are expected from throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

[www.impact.org](http://www.impact.org)

### **IMPACT Media registration**

BIG and ESMO welcome media interested in obtaining information and reporting on cancer issues. Registration is free to bona fide journalists on presentation of a letter of assignment and a valid press card. To register for the event, please complete Media Registration Form at [www.impact.org](http://www.impact.org) (Press & Media section).

### **Media contacts**

For questions about AURORA and BIG

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