

Flawed cancer tests raise patients' concerns

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Breast cancer patients in Newfoundland and Labrador are worried flawed test results have kept them from getting a drug that could improve survival rates.

- CBC NEWS INDEPTH: [Breast cancer](#)

The Eastern Health authority in St. John's is still trying to find out what caused the inaccurate results involving hundreds of hormone receptor tests.

The tests – many of which are now being redone – help determine if the patient is a good candidate for Tamoxifen, which has been shown to make a substantial difference in patient survival rates.



Peter Dawe

Eastern Health found out this spring that many of the results delivered over the last eight years are wrong.

However, some breast cancer patients in this province are just now getting that information.

Peter Dawe, executive director of the provincial chapter of the Canadian Cancer Society, says the news is disturbing.

"You're dealing with cancer, and the last thing you want on your mind is, 'Are my tests accurate?' That's just totally unacceptable," Dawe said.

Eastern Health is having hundreds of tests redone at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto.

The health authority is still trying to find out if the problem was caused by human error or faulty equipment.

Eastern Health says the tests will not be done at its labs in the Health Sciences Centre until accuracy can be guaranteed.

Dr. Bob Williams, a vice-president with Eastern Health, says it is possible that some patients with the wrong test results may have benefited from the drug. An external review of the authority's testing equipment will be done, Williams said.

"Obviously, if we've had a problem in the past, we want to make sure it never occurs again," he said.

The Cancer Society says it has received many calls about the issue. One woman whose results were wrong is considering legal action.

Eastern Health is only contacting patients for whom they have found false-negative results.

The authority says a patient relations officer is available at 777-6500.