INDUCED ABORTION AND THE RISK OF BREAST CANCER

A FULL-TERM pregnancy increases a woman's short-term risk of breast cancer, possibly as a result of the growth-enhancing properties of pregnancy-induced estrogen secretion. By contrast, such a pregnancy decreases the long-term risk of breast cancer, perhaps by inducing terminal differentiation of the susceptible mammary cells.[1-5] Studies in animals suggest that the potential for terminal differentiation of breast cells is lower for a pregnancy terminated by abortion than for a full-term pregnancy. On this basis Russo and Russo[3] have proposed that a full-term pregnancy allows complete differentiation of breast cells, thereby protecting against cancer, whereas an abortion forestalls the late protective effect of differentiation, thereby increasing the risk of breast cancer.

Epidemiologic studies of the association between abortion and the subsequent risk of breast cancer have yielded inconsistent results, with estimates of risk ranging from moderately elevated to significantly lowered.[6-24] In a recent case–control study, Daling et al. found evidence of an elevated risk in women who had an induced abortion between 9 and 12 weeks' gestation, but this finding was based on a very limited number of women.[7] In the present study, we took advantage of

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