

The Million Women Study: design and characteristics of the study population

ABSTRACT

By the end of the year 2002, the Million Women Study will have sufficient statistical power to detect relative risks of 0.8 or less, or of 1.2 or more in current users compared with never users of hormone replacement therapy for mortality from breast cancer, colorectal cancer, lung and ovarian cancer, ischaemic heart disease and stroke.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction The Million Women Study is a nationwide collaborative research project in the UK, the chief aim of which is to describe the relationship between use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and the risk of various conditions, particularly breast cancer. The study began in May 1996 and the plan is to recruit and follow-up a cohort of 1 million women invited to attend the UK National Health Service Breast Screening Programme (NHSBSP). The NHSBSP was set up in 1988. Once every 3 years each woman in the UK aged between 50 and 64 years who is registered with the NHS is sent a letter by the NHSBSP, offering her routine screening for breast cancer by mammography. About 1 million women are screened annually by the NHSBSP and about 5000 of them have a breast cancer detected on mammography. The day-to-day organization and screening activities are performed by about 100 separate screening offices throughout the UK, and the work is monitored and statistics gathered centrally by a national co-ordinating centre. The present paper describes the design of the Million Women Study and the characteristics of the study population.

CONCLUSION

The Million Women Study is one of the largest cohort studies ever devised. Recruitment is proceeding rapidly and the study is on target to accrue a cohort of 1 million women by the year 2000. Preliminary results indicate that the women joining the Million Women Study do not differ substantially from women of a similar age in the general population. It is expected that, within 5 years, the study will have sufficient statistical power to answer questions about the role of HRT in mortality from breast cancer and other specific conditions of interest. This cohort may ultimately include about one woman in every five aged between 50 and 64 years in the UK. This excellent co-operation at a national level reflects the efficient organization of the NHSBSP. It is also indicative, perhaps, of concern by women at the lack of reliable knowledge about the long-term effects of HRT and the fact that in the UK today there is substantial use of this type of therapy.