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Association of the CHEK2 c.1100delC variant, radiotherapy, and systemic treatment with contralateral breast cancer risk and breast cancer-specific survival

Anna Morra1 | Maartje A. C. Schreurs2 | Irene L. Andrulis3,4 |
Hoda Anton-Culver5 | Annelie Augustinsson6 | Matthias W. Beckmann7 |
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Anna Morra and Maartje A. C. Schreurs: Shared first authors.
Marjanka K. Schmidt and Maartje J. Hooning: Shared last authors.
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1 | INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer (BC) has the highest incidence in women worldwide. One of the germline variants that confer a moderate increased BC risk is the CHEK2 c.1100delC variant, which is found in approximately 0.7% of the Northern and Western European populations. Overall, carriers of this variant are diagnosed at a younger age than non-carriers and the majority develops BCs that are estrogen receptor (ER)- and progesterone receptor

Abstract

**Background:** Breast cancer (BC) patients with a germline CHEK2 c.1100delC variant have an increased risk of contralateral BC (CBC) and worse BC-specific survival (BCSS) compared to non-carriers.

**Aim:** To assessed the associations of CHEK2 c.1100delC, radiotherapy, and systemic treatment with CBC risk and BCSS.

**Methods:** Analyses were based on 82,701 women diagnosed with a first primary invasive BC including 963 CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers; median follow-up was 9.1 years. Differential associations with treatment by CHEK2 c.1100delC status were tested by including interaction terms in a multivariable Cox regression model. A multi-state model was used for further insight into the relation between CHEK2 c.1100delC status, treatment, CBC risk and death.

**Results:** There was no evidence for differential associations of therapy with CBC risk by CHEK2 c.1100delC status. The strongest association with reduced CBC risk was observed for the combination of chemotherapy and endocrine therapy [HR (95% CI): 0.66 (0.55–0.78)]. No association was observed with radiotherapy. Results of the multi-state model showed shorter BCSS for CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers versus non-carriers also after accounting for CBC occurrence [HR (95% CI): 1.30 (1.09–1.56)].

**Conclusion:** Systemic therapy was associated with reduced CBC risk irrespective of CHEK2 c.1100delC status. Moreover, CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers had shorter BCSS, which appears not to be fully explained by their CBC risk.

**Keywords**

CHEK2 c.1100delC germline genetic variant, contralateral breast cancer risk, radiotherapy, survival, systemic treatment
(PR)-positive and human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2)-negative.\textsuperscript{3,6} Although this BC subtype has the most favorable prognosis in the general BC population,\textsuperscript{7} CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers have a higher risk of developing contralateral breast cancer (CBC) and worse survival\textsuperscript{8,9,10,11,12} compared to non-carriers.

Reasons behind these differences are still unclear. A possible explanation is that CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers have a different response to treatment compared to non-carriers. Radiotherapy has been shown to increase the risk of CBC in the general BC population, especially in younger patients.\textsuperscript{10} Treatment with radiotherapy causes DNA strand breaks, which are less likely to be repaired in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers.\textsuperscript{11} While this might be beneficial for the treatment of the first primary cancer, carriers might be more prone to developing a CBC.\textsuperscript{12} One case-only study showed a non-significant increased risk for developing CBC after treatment with radiotherapy in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers versus non-carriers, but due to the small study size, the associations in the younger population could not be investigated.\textsuperscript{13} Only one other small study reported on the association between radiotherapy and CBC risk by CHEK2 c.1100delC status.\textsuperscript{8}

On the other hand, less is known about whether the impact of systemic therapy on CBC risk and survival differs by CHEK2 c.1100delC status. A population-based study showed a significant decrease in CBC risk following chemotherapy and endocrine therapy in BC overall.\textsuperscript{14} One single-hospital study also found a decreased risk of CBC after chemotherapy use in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers, and did not find evidence for a differential association by CHEK2 c.1100delC status.\textsuperscript{15} That study also found no evidence for a differential impact of chemotherapy on survival.\textsuperscript{15}

Given this uncertainty, our aim was to assess, within a large international cohort, potential differential associations of treatment given for the first primary BC (i.e., radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and endocrine therapy) by CHEK2 c.1100delC status with CBC risk and to investigate whether the worse breast cancer-specific survival (BCSS) so far reported in carriers is explained solely by the increased CBC risk.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 | Study population

We used data from the Breast Cancer Association Consortium (BCAC), selected women of European ancestry, diagnosed with a first primary invasive BC between 1980 and 2018; exclusion criteria are shown in Figure 1. The main analyses were based on 82,701 BC patients from 58 BCAC studies (Table S1). All individual studies were approved by the appropriate institutional review boards and/or medical ethical committees. Written informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

Previous analyses investigating the relationship between CHEK2 c.1100delC status, risk of CBC, and mortality have been based on a subset of patients genotyped with Taqman.\textsuperscript{3,4} In particular, the current study includes most carriers from the Weischer et al. study ($n=459$)\textsuperscript{6} and from the Kriege et al. study ($n=193$),\textsuperscript{5} but is based on a larger number of BC patients and includes updated follow-up data.

2.2 | Data collection

All relevant clinical-pathological and treatment information, as well as outcome information, was collected by individual studies and harmonized by the BCAC Survival, Pathology and Treatment Working Group at the Netherlands Cancer Institute, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in collaboration with the individual studies before incorporation into the BCAC database (version 13, May 2021). CHEK2 c.1100delC status was obtained from five different sources: BRIDGES sequencing data, Taqman and IPLEX genotyping\textsuperscript{3,4,17} (56.5\% of the included study individuals: 0.9\% CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers and 55.6\% non-carriers, respectively), and imputed genotypes from OncoArray\textsuperscript{18} (32.0\% of the included study individuals: 0.02\% defined as CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers and 31.8\% defined as non-carriers based on imputed dosages) or iCOGS\textsuperscript{19} (the remaining 11.5\% of the included study individuals: 0.1\% defined as CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers and 11.4\% as non-carriers based on imputed dosages) as described in the Supplementary Methods.

2.3 | Statistical analyses

Multiple imputation, performed using R package MICE (version 3.13.0), was used to handle missing values in clinical and pathological variables. Details are given in the Supplementary Methods and Table S2. Descriptive statistics are shown as mean ± standard deviation (SD) or median and interquartile range (IQR). We used Pearson’s chi-squared test for categorical data and Kruskal–Wallis test for continuous data to calculate differences in patients’ characteristics. The primary study outcomes were time to CBC and BCSS (time to death due to BC).

Hazard ratios (HRs) and 95\% confidence intervals (CIs) for the association of treatment given for the first primary BC (radiotherapy and/or type of systemic treatment) and CHEK2 c.1100delC status with time to CBC
FIGURE 1 Data flowchart of inclusion and exclusion of patients with breast cancer from the Breast Cancer Association Consortium (BCAC) database.

were estimated via Cox regression models allowing for delayed entry, stratified by country and adjusted for age at first primary BC diagnosis, tumor size, nodal status, grade, and ER status. Since ER status is known to violate the proportionality hazards assumption and because the majority of CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers develop ER-positive BC, we performed an additional main analysis restricted to patients diagnosed with a first primary ER-positive BC. We assumed that patients with unknown CBC status did not develop a CBC during follow-up and that for CBC cases with unknown time from first primary BC to CBC diagnosis, CBC occurrence was at last available follow-up.

Time at risk started either 3 months after first primary BC diagnosis or at study entry if entry was more than 3 months after first primary BC diagnosis, and ended at time of CBC, death or last follow-up, whichever came first. We tested for potential differential association of adjuvant and/or neo-adjuvant therapy on CBC risk according to CHEK2 c.1100delC status by including an interaction term between treatment (radiotherapy or systemic treatment) variable and CHEK2 c.1100delC status in the model. CBC risk analyses were stratified by two follow-up time intervals: (i) the first 5 years after BC diagnosis and (ii) starting 5 years after BC diagnosis.

To gain further insight into the relation between CHEK2 c.1100delC status, treatment given for the first primary BC, CBC risk, and death, we used a multi-state model in the framework of the Cox model, with diagnosis of the first primary BC as initial state, diagnosis of CBC as intermediate (transient) state, and death due to BC, death due to other causes, and death due to unknown causes as absorbing states (Figure 2), as specified in the Supplementary Methods.

The main CBC risk and multi-state analyses were performed on imputed datasets. Complete-case analyses (excluding study subjects with missing values in any of the variables included in the models) were performed as sensitivity analyses. Additional analyses were restricted to: (a) patients diagnosed with first primary BC from 2000 onwards to reduce heterogeneity in treatment regimens; (b) patients diagnosed at age 40 or younger to see if the association with radiotherapy was stronger in
3 RESULTS

This study included data from 963 CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers and 81,738 non-carriers. Patients carrying the CHEK2 c.1100delC variant were diagnosed with a first primary invasive BC at a younger age (median age 52 years in carriers compared to 65 years in non-carriers) and in earlier calendar years (36.4% of carriers was diagnosed before 2000, compared to 27.6% of the non-carriers). The tumors of carriers were larger at time of diagnosis and were more often lymph node-positive, grade 2, and ER- and PR-positive than in non-carriers. Furthermore, carriers more often underwent a mastectomy as part of their treatment compared to non-carriers and more often did not receive any systemic therapy compared to the non-carriers (Table 1).

3.1 Contralateral breast cancer

CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers were diagnosed with CBC at younger age and in earlier calendar years. Overall, the characteristics of the CBC were similar between the non-carriers and carriers (Table S3). However, CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers more often had positive nodes at CBC diagnosis than non-carriers (p = 0.02).

3.2 Contralateral breast cancer risk by treatment and CHEK2 c.1100delC carrier status

There was no evidence for a differential association of CHEK2 c.1100delC status by radiotherapy (Tables 2 and 3; p-value for interaction = 0.31 in all patients and p-value for interaction = 0.99 in ER-positive patients) or systemic therapy (p-value for interaction = 0.46 in all patients and p-value for interaction = 0.68 in ER-positive patients). Moreover, we did not find an association of radiotherapy with CBC risk [HR (95% CI): 1.07 (0.94–1.21), p = 0.33 in all BC patients and 1.07 (0.92–1.25), p = 0.35 in ER-positive BC patients]. Regarding systemic therapy, we observed that chemotherapy alone [HR (95% CI): 0.77 (0.62–0.96), p = 0.02 in all BC patients and 0.73 (0.52–1.03), p = 0.07 in ER-positive BC patients], endocrine therapy alone [HR (95% CI): 0.70 (0.58–0.83), p < 0.001 in all BC patients and 0.66 (0.54–0.81), p < 0.001 in ER-positive BC patients], and the combination of both [HR (95% CI): 0.65 (0.55–0.78), p < 0.001 in all BC patients and 0.65 (0.52–0.82), p < 0.001 in ER-positive BC patients] were associated with lower CBC risk compared to women who did not receive any systemic therapy as part of their treatment.

Results of analyses for patients diagnosed at the age of 40 years or younger or for patients diagnosed from 2000 onwards were in line with the results of the main analyses (Tables S4 and S5). Complete-case analyses results were consistent with the corresponding results of the imputed data analyses (Tables S6–S9), except for the association with radiotherapy in patients diagnosed at the age of 40 years or younger. For these patients, radiotherapy was significantly associated with increased CBC risk in the complete-case analysis with follow-up starting 5 years after diagnosis of the first primary BC [Table S7; HR (95% CI): 2.12 (1.06–4.22), p = 0.03]. In addition, interaction terms between treatments and CHEK2 c.1100delC status could not be properly estimated in some of the complete-case analyses, due to insufficient data. These included, among others, the analysis based on all patients with follow-up starting at 5 years after BC diagnosis; the analysis restricted to patients diagnosed at the age of 40 years or younger and based on the total follow-up; and the analysis restricted to ER-positive BC with follow-up starting 5 years after BC diagnosis (Tables S10–S12).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Non-carriers</th>
<th>CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of patients, n</td>
<td>81,738</td>
<td>963</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of patients diagnosed with CBC, n (%)</td>
<td>1757 (2.1)</td>
<td>59 (6.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of patients diagnosed with ipsilateral BC, n (%)</td>
<td>517 (0.6)</td>
<td>6 (0.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total FU time, years (IQR)</td>
<td>9.2 (5.3–13.6)</td>
<td>9.6 (5.5–13.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clinical risk factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at diagnosis, y, median (IQR)</td>
<td>56 (47–64)</td>
<td>52 (44–61)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at diagnosis, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;40 years</td>
<td>9471 (11.6)</td>
<td>171 (17.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–50 years</td>
<td>19,978 (24.4)</td>
<td>277 (28.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–60 years</td>
<td>23,044 (28.2)</td>
<td>266 (27.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;60 years</td>
<td>29,245 (35.8)</td>
<td>249 (25.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of diagnosis, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–1989</td>
<td>2259 (2.8)</td>
<td>48 (5.1)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1990–1999</td>
<td>20,055 (24.8)</td>
<td>297 (31.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–2009</td>
<td>45,910 (56.7)</td>
<td>492 (51.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥2010</td>
<td>12,781 (15.8)</td>
<td>113 (11.9)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing, n</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tumor characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tumor size, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>≤2 cm</td>
<td>40,263 (63.0)</td>
<td>421 (58.6)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;2 and ≤5 cm</td>
<td>20,977 (32.8)</td>
<td>273 (38.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;5 cm</td>
<td>2718 (4.3)</td>
<td>24 (3.3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing, n</td>
<td>17,780</td>
<td>245</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lymph node status, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>42,079 (61.4)</td>
<td>439 (54.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>26,456 (38.6)</td>
<td>362 (45.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing, n</td>
<td>13,203</td>
<td>162</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>12,572 (19.1)</td>
<td>112 (15.3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>31,594 (48.1)</td>
<td>388 (53.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>21,536 (32.8)</td>
<td>232 (31.7)</td>
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<td>Missing, n</td>
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<td>Morphology, n (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ductal</td>
<td>52,127 (74.0)</td>
<td>659 (77.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lobular</td>
<td>10,596 (15.0)</td>
<td>116 (13.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medullary</td>
<td>619 (0.9)</td>
<td>3 (0.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed (ductal and lobular)</td>
<td>3032 (4.3)</td>
<td>37 (4.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mucinous</td>
<td>895 (1.3)</td>
<td>7 (0.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papillary</td>
<td>160 (0.2)</td>
<td>22 (0.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tubular</td>
<td>908 (1.3)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2111 (3.0)</td>
<td>5 (2.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing, n</td>
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<tr>
<td>ER status, n (%)</td>
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<td>Positive</td>
<td>54,481 (79.7)</td>
<td>694 (88.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing, n</td>
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### Table 1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<th>CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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<td>PR status, n (%)</td>
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<td>169 (24.5)</td>
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<td>Positive</td>
<td>40,548 (68.0)</td>
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<td>HER2 status, n (%)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>37,395 (83.5)</td>
<td>418 (82.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>7376 (16.5)</td>
<td>89 (17.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing, n</td>
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<td>Treatment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surgery, n (%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breast conserving surgery</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Type unknown</td>
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<td>169 (25.2)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Radiotherapy, n (%)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>181 (27.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>37,479 (74.0)</td>
<td>474 (72.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Systemic therapy, n (%)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>No systemic therapy</td>
<td>4996 (11.2)</td>
<td>94 (17.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT, no ET</td>
<td>7501 (16.8)</td>
<td>88 (15.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ET, no CT</td>
<td>16,976 (38.1)</td>
<td>153 (27.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both CT and ET</td>
<td>15,116 (33.9)</td>
<td>218 (39.4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing, n</td>
<td>37,149</td>
<td>410</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trastuzumab, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37,466 (95.4)</td>
<td>478 (95.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1819 (4.6)</td>
<td>24 (4.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing, n</td>
<td>42,453</td>
<td>461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Percentages are only on observed, non-missing data, and may not total 100 because of rounding.

**Abbreviations:** CBC, contralateral breast cancer; CT, chemotherapy; ER, estrogen receptor; ET, endocrine therapy; HER2, human epidermal growth factor receptor 2; PR, progesterone receptor.

Data component not actively collected in BCAC.

### 3.3 CHEK2 c.1100delC Carrier Status, Contralateral Breast Cancer, and Survival Trajectories

CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers versus non-carriers had an almost 2.4-fold risk of developing a CBC [HR (95% CI): 2.37 (1.82–3.08), p < 0.001 in all patients and 2.55 (1.87–3.48), p < 0.001 in patients with an ER-positive first primary BC; Table 4] and a 1.3-fold risk of BC death after censoring for CBC occurrence [HR (95% CI): 1.30 (1.09–1.56), p = 0.003 in all patients and 1.38 (1.12–1.71), p = 0.003 in patients with an ER-positive first primary BC; Table 4]. There was no evidence for association of CHEK2 c.1100delC carrier status with other transitions. Results from the analyses restricted to patients diagnosed with first primary BC from 2000 onwards were in line with the results from the main analyses (Table S15).

Regarding treatment, radiotherapy was associated with lower risk of death due to causes other than BC or unknown causes, while there was no significant association with BC-specific death (Tables S13–S15). Endocrine therapy alone was associated with a significantly decreased risk of BC-specific death (particularly in patients diagnosed with an ER-positive first primary BC) and with a highly significantly decreased risk of death due to unknown causes. The combination of endocrine therapy and chemotherapy was associated with decreased risk of BC death (in patients diagnosed with an ER-positive first
primary BC), with risk of death due to causes other than BC and had the strongest protective association against death due to unknown causes (Table S14). The corresponding complete-case analyses showed similar patterns of association (Tables S16–S18).

4 | DISCUSSION

The main goal of this study was to assess potential differential associations of treatment by CHEK2 c.1100delC status with CBC risk and to investigate if the poorer survival in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers may be explained alone by the occurrence of CBC. The Breast Cancer Association Consortium provided a unique resource of 963 carriers of this single CHEK2 variant to study this question in more detail.

These data did not support the hypothesis of differential associations of treatment with CBC risk by CHEK2 c.1100delC status. As expected, systemic therapy was found to decrease CBC risk, with the strongest association in the first 5 years after first primary BC diagnosis, when
endocrine therapy is likely to be ongoing. Overall, we did find that the combination of endocrine therapy with chemotherapy resulted in the largest reduction in CBC risk, which has been previously reported. The lack of evidence for a differential association of systemic therapy with CBC risk by CHEK2 c.1100delC status suggests that carriers experience a similar beneficial effect as non-carriers. This is in line with previous studies in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers.

In addition, we did not find a significant association of radiotherapy with CBC risk. This lack of association is in contrast with previous studies in sporadic BC patients, which showed that radiotherapy is a contributor to CBC risk, especially when treatment was administered at a younger age. One explanation for this might be the change of radiation techniques over time. However, analyses restricted to patients diagnosed from the year 2000 onwards, when treatment regimens were expected to be more homogeneous, showed similar results as were found in the main analyses. Therefore, although observational—and non-randomized—studies like the present cannot rebut hypotheses of causality, these changes are unlikely to be the reason behind the lack of association between radiotherapy and CBC risk in our study.

In line with previous studies, we found a greater than twofold increased risk of CBC in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers compared to non-carriers. This is consistent with the reported increase in risk of a first primary BC suggesting that genetic variants that predispose to the development of a first BC will also predispose to the development of a CBC. We also observed a shorter BCSS in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers compared to non-carriers, after accounting for CBC occurrence, age at diagnosis of the first primary BC and tumor characteristics. This suggests that the shorter BCSS in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers versus non-carriers is partly explained by a component other than the established prognostic factors. Moreover, CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers were on average diagnosed in earlier calendar years compared to non-carriers. Therefore, carriers probably received less efficacious chemotherapy and endocrine therapy compared to non-carriers, which could have affected survival.

The main strengths of our study are the large sample size, including information about tumor pathology, treatment, time to CBC and survival, and a median follow-up of over 9 years. In addition, the use of a multi-state model provides important advantages compared to individual survival models with different endpoints. By modeling all events of interest together, the multi-state model
gives insight on how intermediate events, such as CBC, affect survival. Moreover, it allows estimation of associations with transition-specific treatment and covariates, thereby providing insight on whether and to what extent the associations change across transitions and corresponding endpoints. Most of the studies were hospital- or population-based, and most BC patients were unaware of a CHEK2 variant, which we determined in the research setting. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that knowledge of carrier status could have affected clinical data collection.

There are some limitations to our study that need to be acknowledged. Between studies there was minor heterogeneity in the definition of stage, grade, and cut-offs for ER, PR, and HER2 status, which would have affected both carriers and non-carriers to a similar extent and is unlikely to have impacted our conclusions. Many of the variables related to tumor characteristics and treatment had large proportions of missing values. Complete-case analyses have less power to detect the associations of interest and might be biased if case data are not missing completely at random. We addressed the missing data problem by employing multiple imputation, which should provide unbiased estimates, assuming that data are missing at random and that imputation models are correctly specified. Analyses restricted to complete-case data yielded results that were mostly consistent with the results based on imputed data. In addition, in some complete-case analyses, the number of CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers was too low to properly estimate the interaction terms. This underlines the importance of the analyses based on imputed data, which avoids losses in the number of cases and events in the analyses. We also did not consider type of chemotherapy or endocrine therapy in the analyses, nor had we information about ovarian function suppression. Moreover, information about the occurrence of primary ipsilateral BCs was very limited and could not be properly accounted for in our analyses. However, based on the available information, there was no difference in the proportion of ipsilateral BC between CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers and non-carriers (0.6% in both groups) and is unlikely to have had a major impact on our BCSS results.

An additional limitation was the lack of information on cause of death for about 25% of those who had died. This would result in a loss of power to detect associations with BCSS if most of the deaths of unknown causes were due to BC. However, this would, at worst, dilute our results rather than leading to false-positive significant associations with BCSS. Finally, while we accounted for several established BC prognostic factors in our analyses, we cannot exclude the presence of residual bias affecting to some extent our results. An example of such bias is known as “indication bias,” which applies to the presence of an indication which causes or affects the outcome of interest. This could explain some of the unexpected results for the association of radiotherapy and systemic treatment with death-related outcomes, in case treatment decisions are influenced by the presence/absence of certain conditions or morbidities in such a way that patients receiving the treatment are less likely to die from other causes than BC. While indication bias could have affected the treatment-related effects on mortality, it is less likely to be an issue for the association of CHEK2 c.1100delC status and treatment with CBC risk and survival.

In conclusion, the results of our study did not provide evidence for differential associations with radiation or systemic therapy by CHEK2 c.1100delC status on CBC risk. This suggests that associations of these treatments with CBC risk are similar between carriers and non-carriers. Furthermore, we confirmed the presence of a risk component for BC-specific death in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers which is not explained by CBC occurrence or characteristics of the first primary BC. Genotyping of CHEK2 c.1100delC in patients of ongoing clinical trials would allow the evaluation of treatment response in detail and determine any impact of the CHEK2 c.1100delC variant on the efficacy of BC treatment. In addition, studies focusing on, for example, the molecular copy number aberration profile of CHEK2-related tumors should further shed light on potential biological mechanisms underlying the observed increased CBC risk and possible worse survival in CHEK2 c.1100delC carriers.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Anna Morra: Conceptualization (equal); data curation (equal); formal analysis (equal); investigation (equal); methodology (equal); software (equal); writing – original draft (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Maartje A. C. Schreurs: Conceptualization (equal); data curation (equal); formal analysis (equal); investigation (equal); methodology (equal); software (equal); writing – original draft (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Irene L. Andruh: Funding acquisition (equal); resources (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Hoda Anton-Culver: Funding acquisition (equal); resources (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Annelie Augustinsson: Funding acquisition (equal); resources (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Mattias W Beckman: Funding acquisition (equal); resources (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Sabine Behrens: Data curation (equal); funding acquisition (equal); resources (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Stig E Bojesen: Funding acquisition (equal); resources (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Manjeet K. Bolla: Data curation (equal); funding acquisition (equal); resources (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

Hiltrud Brauch: Funding acquisition
methodology (equal); software (equal); supervision (equal); writing – original draft (equal); writing – review and editing (equal).

AFFILIATIONS
1Division of Molecular Pathology, The Netherlands Cancer Institute, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
2Department of Medical Oncology, Erasmus MC Cancer Institute, Rotterdam, the Netherlands
3Fred A. Litwin Center for Cancer Genetics, Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute of Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
4Department of Molecular Genetics, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
5Department of Medicine, Genomic Epidemiology Research Institute, University of California Irvine, Irvine, California, USA
6Oncology, Clinical Sciences in Lund, Lund University, Lund, Sweden
7Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Comprehensive Cancer Center Erlangen-EMN, Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg, University Hospital Erlangen, Erlangen, Germany
8Division of Cancer Epidemiology, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany
9Copenhagen General Population Study, Herlev and Gentofte Hospital, Copenhagen University Hospital, Herlev, Denmark
10Department of Clinical Biochemistry, Herlev and Gentofte Hospital, Copenhagen University Hospital, Herlev, Denmark
11Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
12Centre for Genetic Epidemiology, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
13Dr. Margarete Fischer-Bosch-Institute of Clinical Pharmacology, Stuttgart, Germany
14IFIT-Cluster of Excellence, University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany
15German Cancer Consortium (DKTK), Partner Site Tübingen, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Tübingen, Germany
16Department of Internal Medicine and Huntsman Cancer Institute, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA
17Oncology and Genetics Unit, Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria Galicia Sur (IISGS), Xerencia de Xestión Integrada de Vigo-SERGAS, Vigo, Spain
18Intermountain Healthcare, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA
19Cancer Epidemiology Group, University Cancer Center Hamburg (UCCH), University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany
20Departments of Pediatrics and Medicine, Columbia University, New York, New York, USA
21Department of Cancer Genetics, Institute for Cancer Research, Oslo University Hospital-Radiumhospitalet, Oslo, Norway
22Faculty of Medicine, Institute of Clinical Medicine, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
23Department of Research, Vestre Viken Hospital Drammen, Norway
24Department of Tumor Biology, Institute for Cancer Research, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway
25Division of Surgery, Cancer and Transplantation Medicine, Department of Oncology, Oslo University Hospital-Radiumhospitalet, Oslo, Norway
26Department of Oncology, Akershus University Hospital, Lørenskog, Norway
27Oslo Breast Cancer Research Consortium, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway
28Department of Medical Genetics, Oslo University Hospital and University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
29Department of Community Medicine, The Arctic University of Norway, Tromso, Norway
30Core Facility for Biobanking, The Arctic University of Norway, Tromso, Norway
31Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota, USA
32Department of Oncology and Metabolism, Sheffield Institute for Nucleic Acids (SINPaNA), University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
33Department of Neuroscience, Academic Unit of Pathology, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
34Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden
35Department of Clinical Genetics, Fox Chase Cancer Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
36Department of Pathology, Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, the Netherlands
37Department of Human Genetics, Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, the Netherlands
38Gynaecology Research Unit, Hannover Medical School, Hannover, Germany
39Department of Oncology, Centre for Genetic Epidemiology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
40School of Life Sciences, University of Westminster, London, UK
41Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK
42Division of Evolution and Genomic Sciences, School of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, University of Manchester, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, Manchester, UK
43North West Genomics Laboratory Hub, Manchester Centre for Genomic Medicine, St Mary’s Hospital, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre, Manchester, UK
44Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, University Hospital Düsseldorf, Heinrich-Heine University Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany
45Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and Informatics, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
46Cancer Research UK Edinburgh Centre, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
47Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, Department of Health and Human Services, National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, USA
48Department of Breast Surgery, Herlev and Gentofte Hospital, Copenhagen University Hospital, Herlev, Denmark
49Cancer Genetics and Epidemiology Group, SERGAS, Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria de Santiago de Compostela (IDIS) Foundation, Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Santiago, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
50Medical Oncology Department, Hospital Clínico San Carlos, Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria San Carlos (IdISSC), Centro Investigación Biomédica en Red de Cáncer (CIBERONC), Madrid, Spain
51Department of Epidemiology, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, New York, New York, USA
52Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center, New York, New York, USA
53Health and Medical University, Potsdam, Germany
54Molecular Epidemiology Group, O080, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany
55Molecular Biology of Breast Cancer, University Women’s Clinic Heidelberg, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany
56Institute of Diabetes Research, Helmholtz Zentrum München, German Research Center for Environmental Health, Neuherberg, Germany
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**ETHICS STATEMENT**

All individual studies were approved by the appropriate institutional review boards and/or medical ethical committees. Written informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

**DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

The datasets analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to protection of participant privacy and confidentiality, and ownership of the contributing institutions, but may be made available in an anonymized form via the corresponding author on reasonable request and approval of the involved institutions. To receive access to the data, a concept form must be submitted, which will then be reviewed by the BCAC Data Access Coordination Committee (DACC); see [http://bcac.cege.medschl.cam.ac.uk/bcadata/](http://bcac.cege.medschl.cam.ac.uk/bcadata/).

**ORCID**

Anna Morra [https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4983-7883](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4983-7883)

Maartje A. C. Schreurs [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1826-5344](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1826-5344)

Hoda Anton-Culver [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9603-0110](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9603-0110)

Stig E. Bojesen [https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0856-5631](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0856-5631)

Thilo Dörr [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9458-0282](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9458-0282)

Jonine D. Figueroa [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5100-623X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5100-623X)

Marlise Gabrielsson [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3171-1556](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3171-1556)

Manuela Gago-Dominguez [https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6713-4351](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6713-4351)

José A. García-Sáenz [https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6880-0301](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6880-0301)

Eric Hahn [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1152-8367](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1152-8367)

Jaana M. Hartikainen [https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8267-1905](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8267-1905)

Helena Jernström [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2301-5147](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2301-5147)

Esther M. John [https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3259-8003](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3259-8003)

Diether Lambrechts [https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3429-302X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3429-302X)
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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.