

VARIOUS TREATMENT MODALITIES FOR BREAST CANCER: A REVIEW

*Nosheen Mustafa and Marriam Zaka

Lahore College for Women University Jail Road Lahore. Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author: Nosheen Mustafa

Lahore College for Women University Jail Road Lahore. Pakistan.

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ABSTRACT

Breast cancer is the leading cause of death specifically among women in both developed and under developed countries. Due to lack of the involvement of the patients in their treatment decisions most of them accepted their physician's decision. Breast conserving surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy are the most commonly used allopathic treatment which increase the survival rate but they also caused adverse drug reactions. And these conventional treatment related toxicities divert the patient towards the usage of alternative therapies. Massage therapy, vitamins, supplements, herbal and homeopathic treatment are the some examples of complementary and alternative therapies whose use are increases day by day. Among these massage or relaxation therapy are also prescribe sometimes by the oncologist but along with the allopathic treatment. Rigid people which have firm religious or cultural beliefs are also use traditional treatment like hikmat and dam darood. Most of the women with the breast cancer use these alternative therapies along with the conventional treatment but without informing their oncologists. Physicians should explain all the aspects of the disease or their treatment as well as drug interactions or adverse drug reactions with the patient and tell them not only conventional treatment cause problem, alternative therapies also create toxicities specially if use both therapies simultaneously.

KEYWORDS: Breast cancer, Breast conserving surgery, Complementary and Alternative medicines, Traditional treatments.

INTRODUCTION

Background: Breast cancer is the most frequently occurring tumor among women both in backward and established countries. Ten percent of all new cases in whole world per year are diagnosed from breast cancer especially of women. Incidence and mortality rates are the main markers which are used for the estimation of the occurrence of the disease in the country.^[1] Aging rises the prevalence of breast cancer and it is more common among women aged from 50-64.^[2] The definite cause of breast cancer is still unrevealed, however different patient shows different risk factors for the development of disease such as "Dietary factors, obesity, use of oral contraceptives, age and family history, nulliparity, infertility, old age, early menarche, late menopause and positive family history etc.". Lack of breast feeding and child bearing age also shows positive relationship with the etiology of breast cancer.^[3]

Community is unfamiliar with this disease prevalence and the screening guidelines. "The aim of screening is to reduce mortality from breast cancer by detecting and treating it when it is small and before it has had the chance to spread". Diagnostic tests should be inexpensive, painless and uncomplicated which is easily performed by the patients of every society. There are different barriers which resist the patient to early

detection and to receive right treatment. Breast self-examination and mammography are the common and efficacious methods used for the early detection of the breast cancer.^[4]

Different treatment choices

80% patients purely believed their physicians and accepted their decisions about the treatment. In spite of this that the patient is the important part of this "decision making process" he shows no concern in this matter. Patients have less information about their disease and treatment which are the main barrier.^[5] Different educational programs are conducted to increase the knowledge of community which leads to the better quality of life and also increase the communication level between the patient and the physician.

In the start of their treatment women reject the surgical therapy because of less knowledge or their fear about surgery, but "Breast conserving surgery" is the best treatment option for the of patients.^[6] Cancer treatment is mainly affected by the patient's age as well as side effects or knowledge about the disease. Radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgical therapy are more commonly used by the younger patients but older women are more prone to receive mastectomy.^[7]

Radiotherapy and adjuvant chemotherapy increase the survival outcomes of breast cancer patient and also decline the mortality rate as compared to the patients which receive the chemotherapy alone. In high risk breast cancer patients, radiotherapy is added to the chemotherapy and surgery that considerably decrease the mortality. Cardio toxicity is the main complication of the radiotherapy and chemotherapy which is not seen in the chemotherapy alone.^[8]

But now a days there is increasingly use of alternative medicines due to different reasons such as less knowledge about the disease or treatment, dissatisfaction with the conventional therapy, no improvement, side-effects or toxicity as a result of the treatment, religion and cultural beliefs. Mostly people attracted towards these alternative therapies because of the “variable belief in the importance of body, mind, and spirit”.^[9] Alternative therapies are not only used by cancer patients but also frequently used by other population like diabetic, arthritic, kidney problem, ulcer patients etc. It is hard to explain unconventional therapies, because everyone has their own beliefs or ideologies. Age groups of people 25 to 49 as well as those who have good annual income are more frequently used alternative therapies. Mostly people use alternative therapy as an additive therapy with the conventional treatment.^[10]

Generally Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is interpreted “as medical interventions that are not taught widely in medical schools or generally available in hospitals.” Among all of the alternative therapies, physicians generally acquire the massage therapies because it does not require oral drug which shows any interactions or side-effects. Sometimes oncologists also refer the patient to the physiotherapist for these types of alternative therapies. Women with the breast cancer discerned that there is less drug interactions in the homeopathic and herbal treatment. They thought ginger; green tea, garlic etc. are safer and less adverse effects than the allopathic treatment. That is the main reason of increasing use of unconventional therapy particularly in women population; in spite of the fact that herbal drugs have no anticancer property.^[11]

Women use unconventional therapy mostly after performing the breast surgery which instead of increasing their quality they declined their standards or attributes of life. Anxiety, depression which women faced in this disease or after the surgery substantially forced her to move towards the alternative therapies; so physicians should also consider these CNS related symptoms.^[12] Homeopathic treatment is specifically used to enhance the immune system which suppress the germs of cancer and reduce the chemotherapy induced symptoms like distress, nausea etc. But still there mechanism or pharmacological action is under investigation. Generally two types of homeopathic treatment is used first is “Classical homeopathy” and second is “Complex homeopathy”. Those who prescribe

homeopathic components challenged that they work according to their proper rules and regulations which mainly depend on the concept “like cures like”.^[13]

There are not proper hospitals especially in the villages which forced the people to use alternative medicines instead of medical treatment. Muslim community has strong religious beliefs as compared to others and this is the main barrier in the usage of conventional therapies. Traditional therapies such as “Hikmat” and “Dam darood” are more common which are generally done by the “Maulvi, Pirs, Qari, Hakeem” etc. These types of prescribers get the proper knowledge or training from authorized institutions but this case is rare; mostly these are not trained. Traditional treatment also includes “verses of Holy Quran”, “Dua or prayer”, Wazaif” which is done in the fixed time period. Not only under developing countries, developed countries also used alternative and traditional therapies alone or with the conventional treatment.^[14] “Chinese medicine or Ayurveda, mind–body interventions such as meditation, biologically based therapies like herbs, dietary supplements or vitamins, chiropractic or osteopathy and energy therapies” also considered as Complementary and alternative therapies. Few treatments are referred as “Complementary in Nature” e.g. aromatherapy, massage, relaxation techniques, these all if neither really proved as beneficial but also nor caused any adverse effects or drug interactions.

Frequency of usage of these treatments is varying in different countries, communities and regions however a literature suggests that their prevalence is much higher in USA as compared to other Europe countries. Not only according to the countries, has their frequency also showed discrepancy among different stages of cancer. Usually family, friends give the information about the CAM and share their experiences. In this context women mainly commit a mistake that they use the same drugs or prescription which cause a problem, it’s not compulsory that the same disease of two person have same treatment. Media like TV, internet, newspapers, brochures etc. are also main source of information.^[15]

There are so many communication barriers between patients and physicians for example language issues, patient condition, age like geriatric or pediatrics, sex, race, especially education problem and many others. Patients are unwilling to explain all their problems with their oncologist which create many problems. Due to these reasons CAM users not discuss their physicians that they also used other therapies for their disease other than conventional treatment. They think that the alternative treatments are safer for use but they also cause drug interactions. Physicians should encourage the patients to feel free to discuss all their complications and aware them of the use of alternative therapies.^[16] Before the start of the conventional treatment physician should ask the question to the patient about the use of the complementary and alternative medicines and explain

them that they hinder the treatments which cause toxicities.^[17]

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