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Briefing Series on the Role of Psychology in Health Care **Breast Cancer**

- Breast cancer, the most common form of cancer, is the second leading cause of death among women in the U.S. For 2013, it was estimated that 232,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer and almost 65,000 new cases of carcinoma in situ (early stage cancer) would be diagnosed for women.¹ An additional 2,240 new cases of invasive breast cancer were expected to be diagnosed for men.¹
- Chemotherapy for breast cancer can contribute to early onset of cognitive fatigue, nausea, vomiting, hair loss, neuropathy, hormonal fluctuations, and menopause.² Radiation therapy can contribute to pain, fatigue and pigment changes in the skin.²
- Surgical treatment of breast cancer may lead to reduced or uneven breast size, complete removal of one or both breasts, scarring, chronic pain, decreased range of motion, and lymphedema (swelling typically in one or more extremities).²
- Psychological distress can occur incident to breast cancer and most often takes the form of anxiety or depression.³ The prevalence rate for psychological distress in breast cancer patients is 33% at initial diagnosis, 15% at one-year postdiagnosis, and 45% after a cancer recurrence.⁴
- The percentage of breast cancer patients reporting anxiety ranges from 12% to 47%, and rates of depression range from 3% to 34%.⁵⁻⁹ Combined symptoms of anxiety and depression may be found in 11% to 16% of patients.^{5, 10}

| How Psychologists Can Help

- Psychologists can utilize diagnostic measures and interviewing techniques to assess psychosocial distress and body image concerns.¹¹⁻¹³
- Problem-solving therapy, stress management training, and cognitive-behavioral interventions have documented benefits for reducing depression and anxiety in cancer patients.^{12, 14, 15}
- There is clear evidence that psychosocial interventions are effective in reducing distress and promoting adjustment of patients with breast cancer and other types of cancer. Effective symptom management is associated with improved quality of life, better psychological adjustment, and improved understanding of the disease, decision making, adherence with treatment, and response to treatment.^{3, 14, 15}

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