

Book Review

PII: S0959-8049(97)10052-1

Breast Cancer: A Psychological Treatment Manual
Editor: Sandra Haber
Publishers: Springer (1997)
ISBN: 1-85343-369-1

A PSYCHOLOGICAL treatment manual has been written for counsellors and psychologists who work with women with breast cancer and their families. It is a comprehensive guide to the emotional, psychological and social issues faced by women with breast cancer and the methods which can be used by a therapist to support them.

The book starts with an excellent description of breast cancer and a thorough, yet simple, description of the treatments and complex treatment options that a woman with breast cancer may face. This section explains how the counsellor or therapist can support the woman in making her choice and also in coping with the physical and emotional effects of treatment.

It moves on to a discussion of the role of the therapist in supporting a breast cancer patient and in facilitating and encouraging communication between the patient and their cancer specialist. This section is very much tailored towards the American health care system and way of life where the role played by therapists is emphasised so much more than is currently the case in Europe.

The chapter on reactions to diagnosis and treatment is very thorough, and that on the emotions which may be experienced when treatment has ended is excellent. The possible effects on all areas of a woman's life are covered in detail and the counsellor or therapist is given tips on the most appropriate therapeutic strategy at each stage of the illness.

The effects of the illness and treatment on others in the patient's life are exceptionally well described and their need for psychological support (which may often go unrecognised) is emphasised. The chapter on the needs of special populations is very American in its wording, but very comprehensive. The book then moves on to the need for support during recurrence and terminal illness and the role and benefits of support groups and group therapy.

There is a chapter on specific therapeutic interventions which the therapist can adopt and indications for their use, and a review of research findings to date into the effectiveness and benefits of psychological support for women with breast cancer.

The final section is a very useful overview of resources for patients and health care professionals in both the U.K. and U.S.A., which includes books and organisations that offer information, counselling and emotional support.

Although written specifically for counsellors and therapists, this book may also be helpful for health professionals who have not received specialist training in oncology and wish to learn more about how to support the women with breast cancer in their care.

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European Journal of Cancer, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 427-428, 1998
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Printed in Great Britain
0959-8049/98 \$19.00+0.00

Letters

PII: S0959-8049(97)00375-4

Why Are Patients with Malignant Lymphomas Excluded from Clinical Trials? The Experience of an Oncology Institute in Italy

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It is widely recognised that randomised controlled clinical trials provide the only unbiased assessment of treatment efficacy, and that they represent the mainstay through which basic science reaches the bedside. However, the proportion of cancer patients eligible for clinical trials actually enrolled into such studies remains low, particularly for older patients [1]. In the United States, thousands of elderly patients are excluded from clinical trials because Medicare, which pays treatment costs for people over 65 years of age, is unwilling to pay extra costs associated with experimental studies [2]. In the United Kingdom, old age was the only exclusion criterion in nearly 30% of patients with malignant lymphomas excluded from clinical trials between 1981 and 1992 [3].

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Received 3 Jul. 1997; accepted 21 Jul. 1997.

Received 17 Apr. 1997; accepted 29 May 1997.