



Testing and Early Diagnosis

Treatment after Diagnosis of Breast Cancer

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Maria When someone gets diagnosed with breast cancer, what does treatment usually look like?

Dr. Medhavi I think firstly it's critical that one gets treatment at a state-of-the-art cancer centre because breast cancer is treated in a multidisciplinary team, whereby you have the breast surgeons, you have the medical oncologists, the radiation oncologist. And the treatment is usually customised based on first of all, how advanced the cancer is, and secondly, the type of breast cancer. For the treatment purposes we generally divide patients in three buckets. One is when they have localized disease, second is when they have locally advanced disease, or third is when they have stage four or distanced disease. So for localized disease patients, these are the patients where the cancer is still limited to the breast. These are the patients that usually get diagnosed based on the screening tests. They have excellent five-year survival, their survival is closer to 99%, so therefore they have a very high chance of getting cured. Locally advanced patients would be ones whereby the cancer has spread to nearby areas such as lymph nodes. These patients have slightly worse prognosis than patients with localized disease. Their five-year overall survival rate is around 86%. So, in general, for patients who have localized or locally advanced disease, surgery is the main treatment modality. Many of these patients would get radiation after the surgery. In addition, many of these patients would get medications, some of them may require chemotherapy. If somebody has hormone receptor positive disease, they may require hormonal therapy. Nowadays, we have newer treatment modalities such as immunotherapy, targeted agents; so highly selected patients may be eligible to get that. So when we talk about patients who have distance or stage 4 disease, that means their cancer unfortunately has spread to other areas of the body, such as lungs, livers, bones, ect. In a sense, these tumours are not curable. Their overall five-year survival rate is around 29%. For these patients, they can be treated with medications, the idea behind giving medications is first of all to prevent the tumour from progressing, to help relieve any symptoms the patients may have, and often these therapies will also help prolong the life of the patient. And, I think the silver lining is, in the last several years, due to extensive research that has been done in the field of breast cancer, FDA has approved a number of new agents such as immunotherapy, a number of targeted therapies; and breast cancer outcomes have improved incredibly with the addition of each of these new treatment modalities.