Breast Cancer - About Clinical Trials

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About Clinical Trials

Doctors and scientists are always looking for better ways to treat patients with breast cancer. To make scientific advances, doctors create research studies involving people, called clinical trials.

Many clinical trials are focused on new treatments, evaluating whether a new treatment is safe, effective, and possibly better than the current (standard) treatment. These types of studies evaluate new drugs, different combinations of existing treatments, new approaches to radiation therapy or surgery, and new methods of treatment. Patients who participate in clinical trials are often among the first to receive new treatments before they are widely available. However, there is no guarantee that the new treatment will be safe, effective, or better than a standard treatment.

There are also clinical trials that study new ways to ease symptoms and side effects during treatment and manage the late effects that may occur after treatment. Talk with your doctor about clinical trials regarding side effects. In addition, there are ongoing studies about ways to prevent the disease.

Patients decide to participate in clinical trials for many reasons. For some patients, a clinical trial is the best treatment option available. Because standard treatments are not perfect, patients are often willing to face the added uncertainty of a clinical trial in the hope of a better result. Other patients volunteer for clinical trials because they know that these studies are the only way to make progress in treating breast cancer. Even if they do not benefit directly from the clinical trial, their participation may benefit future patients with breast cancer. For example, the benefits of using of dose-dense chemotherapy (giving the drugs more frequently than the traditional three-week intervals) and adding trastuzumab for early-stage breast cancer were tested and confirmed in clinical trials.

Sometimes people have concerns that, by participating in a clinical trial, they may receive no treatment by being given a placebo or a ?sugar pill.? The use of placebos in cancer clinical trials is rare, and for breast cancer research, placebos are most commonly used along with standard therapy. For example, one group of patients receives the standard treatment plus the placebo, and another group receives standard treatment plus the treatment being researched. When a placebo is used in a study, it is done with the full knowledge of the participants. Find out more about placebos in cancer clinical trials. [2]

To join a clinical trial, patients must participate in a process known as informed consent [3]. During informed consent, the doctor should list all of the patient's options, so that the person understands the standard treatment, and how the new treatment differs from the standard treatment. The doctor must also list all of the risks of the new treatment, which may or may not be different from the risks of standard treatment. Finally, the doctor must explain what will be required of each patient to participate in the clinical trial, including the number of doctor visits, tests, and the schedule of treatment. The coverage of clinical trial costs differs by location. In some programs, expenses associated with participating in the research, such as transportation, childcare, meals, and accommodations are reimbursed. It?s important to talk with the research team and your insurance company to learn about how the treatment in a clinical trial will be covered. Learn more about clinical trials [4], including patient safety, phases of a clinical trial, deciding to participate in a clinical trial, questions to ask the research team, and links to find cancer clinical trials [5].

For specific topics being studied for breast cancer, learn more in the Current Research [6] section.

Patients who participate in a clinical trial may stop participating at any time for any personal or medical reason, including if the new treatment is not working or if there are serious side effects. Clinical trials are also closely monitored by experts who watch for any problems with each study. It is important that patients participating in a clinical trial talk with their doctor and researchers about who will be providing their treatment and care during the clinical trial, after the clinical trial ends, and/or if the patient chooses to leave the clinical trial before it ends.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/24390
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24386
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24863
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24878
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/18630