

Cancer Advances: Group Therapy Does Not Improve Survival In Early Stage Breast Cancer Patients

Posted online on September 27, 2004 on www.jco.org [1] [Read the original study](#) [2] Group therapy has been used for several decades to help cancer patients cope with their disease. Several forms of group therapy have been developed specifically for patients with breast cancer, including cognitive-existential group therapy (CEGT), a type of therapy designed to improve mood and mental attitude in women with early stage breast cancer. In CEGT, groups of 6-8 patients meet together once a week with a trained therapist to talk about issues they face as breast cancer patients. Topics that may be discussed include anxiety about dying, fear of their disease returning, understanding cancer therapy, the doctor-patient relationship, body- and self-image, sexuality, relating to friends and family, and lifestyle goals for the future. While previous studies have shown that CEGT can reduce anxiety and suggest that it also may improve family functioning, the ability of CEGT to improve survival in women with early stage breast cancer has not previously been tested, and studies in later stage breast cancer patients have yielded mixed results. In a new study published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* [1], researchers at several institutions in the United States and Australia conducted a study to find out if CEGT improved survival in patients with early stage breast cancer who were being treated with chemotherapy following radiation. Researchers randomly assigned 303 women to receive CEGT and relaxation sessions or relaxation sessions alone. They found that women who received CEGT did not live longer than women who did not participate in the group therapy. **What Does This Mean For Patients?** Group therapy can be an important tool for helping breast cancer patients manage their disease and improve their health-related quality of life. However, in patients with early stage breast cancer, these benefits do not translate into living longer. This study is an important step in understanding how to use group therapy to help breast cancer patients improve the quality of their lives, reduce anxiety about their disease, and enhance their relationships with friends and family. Additionally, this study may help to shape future research designed to improve the benefit afforded to breast cancer patients who enroll in group therapy at any stage of disease.

Links:

[1] <http://www.jco.org/>

[2] <http://www.jco.org/cgi/reprint/JCO.2004.12.129v1?ijkey=tuGSvNsiORAdg&keytype=ref&siteid=jco>