**Group Therapy and Breast Cancer**

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**BACKGROUND:**
Group therapy has been reported to provide benefits for metastatic breast cancer (and other life-threatening illnesses), including improvement in mood, pain control, and in some but not all studies, survival.

**AIM:**
To assess whether supportive-expressive group therapy (in addition to routine care) influences survival, mood, and pain in women with metastatic breast cancer.

**METHODS:**
Multi-center randomized trial in 235 women at seven Canadian Cancer Centers. Group therapy consisted of weekly 90-minute sessions for at least one year.

**MAIN FINDINGS:**
Women in the intervention group had greater improvements in psychological symptoms and pain control (p=0.04) than women in the control group. These benefits occurred in those women who were more distressed at baseline. Group therapy did not prolong survival compared to routine care alone (17.9 vs. 17.6 months; hazard ratio 1.06, 95% CI 0.78-1.45).

**CONCLUSIONS:**
Supportive-expressive group therapy improves mood and perception of pain, particularly in women who are more distressed, but does not prolong survival.
LIMITATIONS:
Some differences between the groups existed in baseline disease variables, though they did not appear to influence the results. About 9% of eligible women were randomly assigned, so there could be questions of generalizability.

IMPACT ON INTERNAL MEDICINE:
Many women with breast cancer ask their health care providers about support groups. Some women are not comfortable with participating in such groups, but may feel anxious about foregoing it, especially after exposure to media accounts of “proven” increased survival. Based on this study, physicians can underline to their patients that the benefits of group therapy lie in improvements in mood and pain. Choosing not to participate will not adversely affect survival.