INAHTA Briefs

Issue 2006/63

Title **Impact of Radiation Wait Times on Risk of Local Recurrence of Breast Cancer: Early Stage Cancer with No Chemotherapy**

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Reference CADTH Technology Report, Issue 46, May 2004. ISBN 1-894978-33-1 (print).
Full text available at www.cadth.ca/media/pdf/155_breastcancerwl_tr_e.pdf

Aim

To assess the relationship between the risk of local recurrence of breast cancer and waiting times for radiation therapy after breast conservation surgery among women with early stage breast cancer who are not receiving chemotherapy.

Conclusions and results

Six relevant, retrospective, observational studies were selected from the 194 potentially relevant studies identified. Waiting times varied from 7 weeks to 20 weeks. Followup time varied from a mean of 5.0 years to a median of 8.4 years. The results were consistent between studies, revealing no differences in the rate of local recurrence of breast cancer among women who had to wait longer for radiation therapy after surgery (up to 12 weeks) compared to those who received earlier therapy (less than 8 weeks). From these studies, 12 weeks can therefore be considered an "acceptable" waiting time. As there were too few women waiting longer than 12 weeks, risk for this group was not evaluated. The impact of radiation therapy wait times on survival was not evaluated.

Recommendations

Not applicable.

Methods

For this systematic review, 11 electronic databases were searched for literature published between January 1997 and June 2003. Hand searching and back referencing were done to locate grey literature and to identify additional studies cited by other authors. For relevant information on guidelines and waiting times, 150 websites were examined. Heads of radiation departments across Canada were asked to identify relevant unpublished manuscripts of abstracts. Two reviewers independently selected articles based on defined criteria. Study quality was assessed using a "strength of evidence" scale from the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care.

Further research/reviews required

More research is needed to address the psychological impact of waiting for radiation therapy.

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ISSN 1654-501X