Purpose/Objectives

To determine whether women with triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) experience greater levels of emotional/psychological characteristics—anxiety, fear, worry, sadness, and confusion—from diagnosis through post-treatment compared to women with other breast cancer subtypes.

Background

In late 2006, medical journals began to publish studies of triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC), a newly described subtype. TNBC disproportionately affects premenopausal women, BRCA1 carriers, and African American women. TNBC is characterized by its triple-negative status (estrogen receptor-, progesterone receptor-, and HER2/neu-negative) which was traditionally seen as a negative prognostic factor. However, TNBC is exceptionally aggressive; it is a newly described subtype. TNBC—mean: 2.7 years; range: 1–15 years

Results

At all time points in an unadjusted analysis, TNBC women reported more fear, anxiety, and worry than non-TNBC women, although this finding was only statistically significant for fear at diagnosis (p=0.001). TNBC women had the strongest emotional changes at all time points, compared to their non-TNBC counterparts. Women with TNBC showed the least decline in negative emotions compared to corresponding non-TNBC women. These data support the development of TNBC-specific interventions focused on the patients’ emotional needs during and after treatment.

Conclusion

Women with TNBC experience greater fear, anxiety, and worry than women with non-TNBC subtypes at all points from diagnosis through post-treatment. While women with all breast cancer subtypes report a reduction in negative emotion from treatment to post-treatment, this change is less profound in TNBC women and appears to be driven primarily by worry. The marginal effect on change in fear with respect to income may reflect concerns about accessing care, and increased worry in women without children may reflect concerns about prospective parents. Most strikingly, stage was the strongest modifier of emotional change: TNBC women at cancer stage 0 showed the least decline in negative emotion compared to corresponding non-TNBC women. These data support the development of TNBC-specific interventions focused on these patients’ emotional needs during and after treatment.