

Breast Cancer and Mental Health Conditions



Women with mental illness are not more likely than the general population to get breast cancer, but they are more likely to be diagnosed later than in the general population and they are much more likely to die from it.

Lower rates of breast cancer screening may contribute to this. A review of research found that rates of mammography screening are lower in women with mental illness, particularly women with serious mental illness (50 percent less likely to receive mammography than members of the general population) and the difference is not explained by emotional distress.

People with mental illness are also less likely to receive specialized interventions for cancer, including surgery, radiation or chemotherapy. Early diagnosis and access to effective treatment are key to surviving cancer.

The New Horizons Behavioral Health, in Columbus, Ga., is working to address these disparities in screening and treatment. New Horizons recently hosted a Breast Cancer Awareness event for women living with mental illness and/or addiction to raise awareness about screening and early detection and to provide information about resources in the community. Women with mental illness are more likely to lack access to health care and lack support to help through the treatment process, according to New Horizons CEO Andrea Winston.

For many, the stress of a diagnosis of breast cancer contributes to mental health challenges, such as anxiety or depression. Some research has found that many women with breast cancer develop some symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), though only a small percentage developed a full diagnosis.

For women with a history of depression or other mood disorders, the stress of a diagnosis of breast cancer can put them at greater risk of experiencing another episode. When active treatment, such as chemotherapy and radiation, has ended may be a particularly vulnerable time, according to psychologist Pamela Ginsberg, Ph.D. Women may have less support after

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treatment, there is much uncertainty and they may not be aware that resources are still available.

Ginsberg reminds women facing breast cancer to seek help when needed: “It’s not a matter of weakness or a matter of not being able to do it on your own. It really is about getting through cancer treatments well as you can with as little suffering as possible.”

To address the issue more broadly, researchers recommend better coordination between mental health providers, screening services and primary care providers; more education of women with mental illness about the importance of screening, and more social support for screening and treatment.

You are not alone.



Source: <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/apa-blog/2017/10/facing-the-dual-challenges-of-breast-cancer-and-mental-health-conditions>