

# **Breast cancer patients benefit from add-on homeopathic treatment: a large cohort study in France**

## **Press release**

### **STUDY HIGHLIGHTS No. 4/2023**

**Quality of life benefits of homeopathy** – several studies have investigated this topic in recent years. In this fourth issue of our “Study Highlights series”, we present a recently published retrospective cohort study based on the French nationwide healthcare database. The study, which analysed 98,009 women who underwent mastectomy<sup>1</sup> for newly diagnosed non-metastatic breast cancer, showed the benefits of add-on homeopathic treatment in helping women better tolerate cancer treatment side effects.

#### **Topic and lead author**

##### **Benefits of homeopathy add-on treatment in breast cancer patients**

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#### **What is the study about and what is the added value of homeopathic treatment?**

Breast cancer treatment methods such as radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone treatment are often associated with side effects which can significantly reduce patients' quality of life. With the improving prognosis of breast cancer survival, more attention is paid to alleviating these side effects and patients' quality of life in general.

In this sense, many cancer patients use complementary medicine as part of their supportive care, with homeopathy being one of the most commonly used complementary therapies<sup>2</sup>: it is reported to be used by 12-19% of patients with breast cancer<sup>3</sup>. Several small studies showed relief from cancer therapy side effects and better health-related quality of life in patients receiving add-on homeopathic treatment. However, larger comparative studies have been lacking until now. The present study filled that gap by observing the benefits of add-on homeopathy in women with non-metastatic breast cancer in a large French cohort.

#### **How was the study conducted?**

- A national retrospective cohort study<sup>4</sup> based on the French nationwide healthcare database<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mastectomy is the surgical removal of breast tissue and refers to the complete or partial removal of the female or male mammary gland.

<sup>2</sup> Molassiotis A, Fernandez-Ortega P, Pud D, Ozden G, Scott JA, Panteli V et al. Use of complementary and alternative medicine in cancer patients; a European survey. *Annals of Oncology* 2005;16:655-663.

<sup>3</sup> Molassiotis A, Scott JA, Kearny N, Put D, Magri M, Selvekerova S et al. Complementary and alternative medicine use in breast cancer patients in Europe. *Supportive Care Cancer* 2006;14:260-267.

<sup>4</sup> A cohort study observes a group of people with similar characteristics (a cohort) over a period of time.

<sup>5</sup> Tuppin P, de Roquefeuil L, Weill A, Ricordeau P, Merlière Y. French national health insurance information system and the permanent beneficiaries sample. *Revue d'Épidémiologie et de Santé Publique* 2010;58:286-290.

- All women in France who underwent mastectomy for newly diagnosed non-metastatic breast cancer between 2012 and 2013 were included.
- Women were followed between breast cancer diagnosis and surgery (pre-surgical period) and for 5 years after surgery. The observation period was divided into 6-month periods.
- Women were divided into 3 groups according to the number of homeopathic medicines dispensed in addition to conventional treatment: class 1: no homeopathic medicines; class 2: 1-2 homeopathic medicines; class 3:  $\geq 3$  homeopathic medicines.
- The main study objective was to assess the benefit of add-on homeopathic treatment on the health-related quality of life. It was measured by the number of the following conventional medications used to alleviate the side effects of cancer therapy:
  - Conventional drugs relieving physical side effects like antiemetics, antidiarrhea and mouthwashes among others.
  - Conventional drugs treating psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and sleeping disorders.
- One of the secondary objectives was to evaluate the impact of homeopathy on costs.

### **What are the scientific results?**

- 26% of women used homeopathic medicines during the 6 months before surgery, and 22% during the 6 months after surgery; thereafter, use of homeopathic medicines remained stable at 15% for the remaining four years of the study.
- For women who had been dispensed  $\geq 3$  homeopathic medicines in the 6 months before mastectomy, the use of conventional drugs to relieve physical side effects of cancer treatment was 12% lower in the 6 months after mastectomy compared to those who didn't receive homeopathy. This difference was significant<sup>6</sup>. A similar pattern was observed in the 7-12 months post-surgery phase<sup>7</sup>.
- The study found no difference in the use of conventional drugs against anxiety, depression and sleeping disorders over the whole post-surgical observation between patients using add-on homeopathy and patients using conventional medicine only.
- The mean cost of conventional drugs administered to alleviate the side effects of cancer treatment during the 6 months after surgery was lower for women who had been dispensed  $\geq 3$  homeopathic medicines compared to those who didn't receive homeopathy (843€  $\pm$  1,703€ vs 1,056€  $\pm$  1,907€). The same was seen for the mean hospital cost (7,123€  $\pm$  5,407€ vs. 7,246€  $\pm$  5,355€).

### **Why are the results of this study important?**

Even with great progress being made in cancer treatment, patients still suffer greatly from side effects. The results of the current study indicate that homeopathy can reduce the use of conventional medications to treat these side effects in women with non-metastatic

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<sup>6</sup> Risk ratio (RR): 0.88 [95%CI: 0.87-0.89],  $p < 0.01$ . RR is a proportion of probabilities: Here, the probability of receiving conventional medications for side-effects of cancer treatment was put in relation between the groups of patients that did use homeopathy, and the group of patients that did not use homeopathy.

<sup>7</sup> RR: 0.94 [95%CI: 0.93-0.95]

breast cancer in the year following mastectomy. Thereby, quality of life and compliance with conventional cancer treatment can be improved.

As patients increasingly ask for complementary medicines to alleviate the side effects of their cancer treatment, physicians need to understand more about non-conventional therapies. This study shows that women who take homeopathic medicines in addition to their conventional treatment are better at tolerating the treatment's side effects, and require fewer additional drugs, demonstrating the value of including homeopathy as an integral part of supportive care in the cancer care pathway.

**What does this study add to the scientific evidence?**

The current study used the French nationwide healthcare database, which allows for continuously observing patients over a long time-period. Additionally, the database constitutes a representative and substantial cohort covering 98% of the French population, thereby avoiding the uncertainties associated with sampling. Finally, it is the first large-scale comparative study evaluating the benefits of add-on homeopathic treatment on health-related quality of life in breast cancer patients in France.

**Where were the results published?**

Medioni J, Scimeca D, Lopez Marquez Y, Leray E, Dalichampt M, Hoertel N et al. Benefits of homeopathic complementary treatment in patients with breast cancer: a retrospective cohort study based on the French nationwide healthcare database. *Clinical Breast Cancer* 2022;23:60-70.

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