

Breast cancer patients benefit from add-on homeopathic treatment according to nationwide French study

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.

Synopsis

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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. Many cancer patients use complementary medicine as part of their supportive care, with homeopathy being one of the most used complementary therapies: it is reported to be used by 12-19% of patients with breast cancer¹.

The study by Medioni et al. assessed the benefits of using homeopathy alongside conventional medical treatment in women with non-metastatic breast cancer, by retrospectively analysing the treatment of 98,000 women in a national healthcare database².

All women in France who underwent mastectomy (complete or partial surgical removal of the breast) for newly diagnosed, non-metastatic breast cancer between 2012 and 2013 were included in the study. These patients were followed between diagnosis and surgery, and then for five years after surgery, to assess the impact of homeopathic treatment on health-related quality of life.

The women were divided into three groups according to the number of homeopathic medicines dispensed in addition to conventional treatment, Group 1: no homeopathic medicines; Group 2: 1-2 homeopathic medicines; Group 3: ≥ 3 homeopathic medicines. The effect of homeopathic treatment was measured by the number of conventional medicines, such as painkillers and anti-depressants, used to alleviate cancer therapy side effects. Another outcome of interest was the impact of homeopathy on costs.

The authors found that 11% of the women used homeopathy during the 7 to 12 months before surgery; 26% used homeopathy within 6 months prior to surgery, and 22% used homeopathy during the 6 months after surgery. Thereafter, 15% of women used homeopathy for the remaining four years of the study.

Six months after surgery, **there was an overall decrease in the dispensing of conventional medication for treating side effects of cancer treatment in women receiving homeopathy (Group 3: ≥ 3 homeopathic medicines) compared to women not using homeopathy.** In this same group, **the use of conventional medicine to relieve physical side effects of cancer treatment was 12% lower** during the six months after surgery than in those who did not receive homeopathy. A similar trend was seen for the 7-12 months post-surgery phase.

The study reported no difference after surgery in conventional medicine dispensing for anxiety, depression and sleeping disorders between patients using add-on homeopathy and patients using conventional treatment only.

The mean cost of conventional medicines dispensed to relieve the side effects of cancer treatment in the six months after surgery was lower for women who had been dispensed ≥ 3 homeopathic medicines (group 3) compared to those who didn't receive homeopathy. The same was seen for the mean hospital cost.

This study is the first large-scale comparative study evaluating the benefits of add-on homeopathic treatment in breast cancer patients in France. The results suggest that homeopathy can help patients to tolerate the physical side effects of cancer treatments, improving their quality of life; reducing the need for conventional drugs prescribed to manage side-effects and reducing healthcare costs. Medioni et al. demonstrates the value of homeopathy as part of an integrated approach to cancer care for breast cancer patients.

1. 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.
2. 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.