Quality of Life in Older Women With Early-Stage Breast Cancer in the First Year of Survivorship

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Purpose/Objectives: To describe quality-of-life (QOL) changes in older women with early-stage breast cancer in the first year of survivorship and report on the effectiveness of a psychoeducational intervention on survivors’ QOL.

Design: Secondary analysis, descriptive, repeated measure.

Setting: An academic setting in the southeastern United States.

Sample: 50 early-stage breast cancer survivors, aged 65 years and older.

Methods: Data were drawn from the Breast Cancer Education Intervention (BCEI) research study. Data for a six-month time period within the survivors’ first year were available for an experimental group participating in a psychoeducational intervention and a control group.

Main Research Variables: Overall QOL and physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being subscales.

Findings: Older women reported positive overall QOL within the first year of survivorship, but overall QOL declined slightly over time. Physical and psychological well-being declined over time. Social well-being initially improved over time, but then declined. Spiritual well-being initially declined over time, then improved. Survivors had a downward trend in overall QOL during the study time period; however, experimental group participants had a smaller decline in QOL compared to control group participants.

Conclusions: QOL in older breast cancer survivors within the first year is positive. However, overall QOL declines over time. The BCEI attenuated decline of QOL in the experimental group compared to the control group.

Implications for Nursing: Few studies focus on older breast cancer survivors. This descriptive study is one of the first to describe changes in QOL and report the effect of interventions for older breast cancer survivors. Oncology nurses are in a position to recognize QOL issues and help older women maintain QOL in the first year of survivorship after treatment.