

Program focused on body, mind and spirit helps women with breast cancer cope

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Pathfinders, a program designed to care for the whole person -- body, mind and spirit -- has been found to help women with terminal cancer cope and improved their quality of life, according to a study led by researchers in the Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center.

"The program helped improve distress and despair during the initial three months and up to six months after diagnosis among [women](#) with metastatic breast [cancer](#) and a six month life expectancy," said Amy Abernethy, M.D., an oncologist at Duke University Medical Center and lead investigator on the study. "Even though the women were getting sicker and experiencing more symptoms related to their cancer, they reported that they felt less distress and despair as a result of being able to better cope with the cancer."

Pathfinders focuses on the seven pillars of personal recovery: hope, balance, inner strengths, self care, support, spirit and life review. The program provides patient navigation, counseling, coping skills training, mind and body techniques and lifestyle advice.

"The goal of the program is to teach patients coping skills for dealing with their cancer," said Tina Staley, director of Pathfinders. "To reach this goal, we have created a common language between patients, nurses, physicians and Pathfinders for communicating coping skills."

For this pilot study, the researchers enrolled 50 adult [breast cancer](#) patients with a prognosis of less than six months survival. The women

met with a Pathfinder, a trained social worker, at least monthly, plus telephone conversations and e-mail exchanges. The social workers helped the women identify inner strength, taught them coping skills and encouraged them to engage in complementary and alternative medical services.

The researchers will present their findings on a poster at the 2009 American Society of Clinical Oncology meeting in Orlando, on Sunday, May 31.

"There is a growing body of data that shows cancer patients have unmet psychosocial needs, and with programs like Pathfinders we are able to care for the whole person," Abernethy said. "As a result, we found that this group of women reported a higher quality of life three months after being diagnosed than was expected."

Source: Duke University Medical Center ([news](#) : [web](#))

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