

# **A third of women with secondary breast cancer are needlessly living in pain, research shows**

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(Medical Xpress) -- New research released today by Breast Cancer Care and the University of Southampton reveals that more than a third (34 per cent) of women with secondary breast cancer are unnecessarily living with uncontrolled pain.

The study, which was led by the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University, Professor Jessica Corner, was funded by [Breast Cancer Campaign](#) and published in the [Journal of Pain and Symptom Management](#).

Researchers found that of the 235 [women](#) surveyed 27 per cent had [shortness of breath](#) and 26 per cent experienced [nausea](#) – both symptoms which can be managed with medication. Women whose breast cancer had spread to their bones were more likely to experience pain, with four in ten (44 per cent) reporting significant pain.

There was little evidence of GP (8 per cent) or local palliative care services (7 per cent) involvement with the study participants. Given the choice, the majority of women (62 per cent) chose their hospital consultant as the healthcare professional they would choose to see on a regular basis. But, with better life prolonging treatments, the prognosis of secondary breast cancer is improving, so for many it is becoming a long-term, complex illness requiring ongoing symptom control and emotional and practical support.

Currently palliative care teams focus on end-of-life care, but more than of the women surveyed had been living with secondary breast cancer for at least two years, so despite their pain, few were at the end-of-life stage of illness and their needs were not being met. This resulted in half saying they were dissatisfied with the care they received.

Elizabeth Reed, Secondary Breast Cancer Research Nurse at Breast Cancer Care and principal investigator of the research said: “Until now there has been little research into the quality of life of women living with secondary breast cancer outside of clinical trials. This study, which is the first of its kind, shows that women with secondary breast cancer have a range of complex, multidimensional needs that are not being met.

“No woman should live with controllable [pain](#) or without the information and advice they need to make decisions about their own health.

Developments in treatment mean that those living with secondary breast cancer are now considered cancer survivors rather than necessarily at the end of life. It is therefore vital that healthcare professionals are equipped with the knowledge and expertise they need to offer women with secondary breast cancer adequate symptom control and the medical and psychological support they need.”

Provided by University of Southampton

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