

Breast cancer diagnosed at later stage in rural patients

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These women also more likely to undergo a mastectomy, researchers say.

(HealthDay)—Breast cancer patients who live farther away from comprehensive cancer centers are more likely to be diagnosed with later-stage disease, according to new research.

These [patients](#) are also more likely to ultimately undergo a mastectomy, the investigators found.

"The main purpose of this study was to determine if women in rural North Dakota and Minnesota were at a disadvantage in terms of breast [cancer](#) screening, treatment and, ultimately, survival outcome," study author Krishan Jethwa, a medical student at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, said in a news release from the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR).

The study was scheduled for presentation Tuesday at the AACR's annual

conference, held in National Harbor, Md.

"Travel in this part of the country can be long and difficult, especially during the winter," Jethwa said. "While investigating the public-health implications of this, we found that women who live farther from a comprehensive cancer center were more likely to be diagnosed with later-stage disease. This highlights the need for improved access to screening and treatment for rural populations."

To explore the issue, the researchers looked at data from 260 women, aged 29 to 94, who had been diagnosed with [breast cancer](#) in 2007 and subsequently treated at a comprehensive cancer center in Fargo, N.D.

None of the patients had a previous history of cancer, and all were white.

Although no link was found between distance to the cancer center and a patient's age at diagnosis, five-year survival rates or radiotherapy treatment, an association was found between travel distance and cancer stage at diagnosis and the type of surgery performed post-diagnosis. However, the association does not prove a cause-and-effect relationship.

Additional research is planned to explore how travel distance to health care centers might affect mammogram frequency and how directly linked mastectomies might be to [cancer stage](#) at diagnosis.

Data and conclusions presented at medical meetings typically are considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: For more on breast cancer, visit the [U.S. National Cancer Institute](#).

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