

Patient navigation may aid in breast cancer treatment in high-risk populations

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Patient navigation, or the linking of a newly diagnosed cancer patient with a professional trained in assisting patients through the complex journey of cancer diagnosis and treatment, may lead to better breast cancer care in high risk and minority women. The findings, recently published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, is the first national study to show a relationship between navigators and the initiation of certain recommended treatments in breast cancer.

Using data from a previously published, multi-center study funded by the National Cancer Institute, researchers aimed to identify the possible benefits of assigning patient navigators to women recently diagnosed with [breast cancer](#). According to the results, women were more likely to start recommended treatment when assisted by one of these trained specialists. For example, they were more likely to start hormonal therapy, which is considered the gold standard in treatment for certain types of breast cancer.

Naomi Ko, MD, MPH, instructor of medicine in the Section of Hematology Oncology at Boston University School of Medicine and a practicing breast oncologist at Boston Medical Center, stresses the need for further investigation. "This study gave us a glimpse of the potential benefit of patient navigation but there's a lot more research to be done. At this point we still need to understand how or why patient navigation works. Understanding where patient navigation is most beneficial in cancer care, in order to help the neediest patients, is a rich topic for future research," said Ko.

Navigators are experts in helping patients overcome the numerous obstacles they face, including monetary difficulties, transportation issues, educational and even language barriers, and have become an integral part of the [cancer care](#) model. It has been known that minority and [high risk](#) patients, or those who may benefit most from these navigators, often have worse outcomes after diagnosed with cancer.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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