

No benefit from surgery prior to drug treatment for metastasised breast cancer

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Credit: Medical University of Vienna

A new study from the ABCSG (Austrian Breast & Colorectal Cancer Study Group) indicates that women suffering from metastasised breast cancer do not benefit from surgery performed prior to drug treatment. This could cause a paradigm shift in treatment of the disease. The multi-centre trial, conducted under the direction of Florian Fitzal, was presented this weekend at the ASCO meeting, one of the most important international cancer conferences. Florian Fitzal is Head of Breast Surgery at the Department of Surgery of MedUni Vienna/Vienna

General Hospital and one of the two deputy heads of the Breast Health Center at the Comprehensive Cancer Centre (CCC) of MedUni Vienna and Vienna General Hospital.

In Austria, around 250 women a year are told they are suffering from primary "[metastatic breast cancer](#)". That means: breast [cancer](#) is first diagnosed at a late stage. Despite recent advances in treatment, a "cure" is not possible in these fortunately rare situations; the therapeutic aims are to maintain quality-of-life and extend life expectancy – many women go on to survive for several years. Breast cancer experts from throughout the world are therefore working to improve treatment strategies and, at the same time, the quality-of-life of their patients.

Paradigm shift

A research team from the ABCSG (President: Michael Gnant, MedUni Vienna/Vienna General Hospital), headed up by Florian Fitzal, therefore explored whether immediate surgical removal of the breast cancer tissue prior to administration of systemic (drug) therapy influences the treatment outcome. During the last decade, this method was regarded as a possible strategy for treating primary metastatic [breast](#) cancer. The scientific basis for this procedure was retrospective studies, that is to say studies that analyse pre-existing data, and these showed that surgery could potentially prolong survival by up to 50%.

The results of the ABCSG-28 trial now show that surgery prior to systemic therapy does not improve the outcome over primary systemic therapy. These results tally with the findings of other international studies that have recently appeared.

Says Fitzal: "Our work shows that an operation does not offer patients any advantage in terms of survival. This means that, in the interests of giving them better quality-of-life, many of them could be spared this

stressful procedure. This could cause a [paradigm shift](#) in the treatment of primary metastatic [breast cancer](#)."

More information: Primary operation in synchronous metastasized invasive breast cancer patients: first oncologic outcomes of the prospective randomized phase III ABCSG 28 POSYITIVE trial. abstracts.asco.org/199/AbstView_199_185733.html

Provided by Medical University of Vienna

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