

# FRANKLY SPEAKING ABOUT CANCER

## IMPROVING PATIENT-PROVIDER COMMUNICATION AND SHARED DECISION MAKING

Patients with metastatic breast cancer are often overwhelmed by their diagnosis and frequent medical appointments; they also report being scared and uncertain about the future. At the same time, research and patient reports show this group tends to have less psychosocial support compared to those with earlier staged breast cancer or patients in remission. **But you can help change this.**

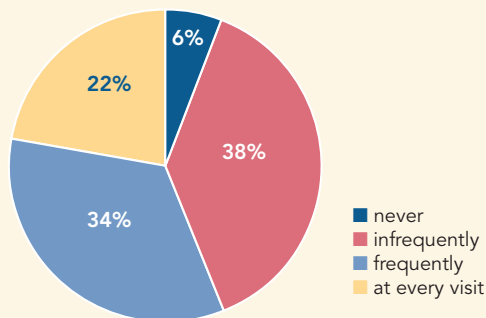
Nurses, social workers, navigators and other health professionals play a critical role in educating patients with metastatic breast cancer, eliciting their concerns and helping them focus on and weigh treatment options — all of which can greatly improve care. This handout offers tips to help improve communication and offer valuable and timely treatment decision support.

The Cancer Support Community provides support, education and hope to people affected by metastatic breast cancer through *Frankly Speaking About Cancer: Metastatic Breast Cancer* and other support programs.

### A REASON TO TALK – AND LISTEN – MORE

Although a majority of patients with metastatic breast cancer report having good communication with their health care team, 2 out of 5 still don't openly discuss deeper concerns about emotional well-being, side effects, symptoms and quality of life – factors that can alter treatment recommendations.

How Often Patients Share Concerns



Source: Cancer Support Community. (2012) "Open to Options™/Advanced breast cancer online survey results report."

### GOOD PATIENT-PROVIDER COMMUNICATION IS KEY

When patients openly share their concerns and partner with their health care team, they are more likely to receive quality care.

Engaging patients in their care:

- Helps them feel more in control
- Increases the likelihood that treatment aligns with their needs, preferences, and goals
- Promotes greater patient satisfaction and buy-in for treatment plans, which can increase adherence
- Makes their diagnosis seem less scary
- Leads to better communication!

### ADVICE FROM OTHERS: 5 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION & ELICIT CONCERNS

- 1 **Carve out time for your patients** either by phone or in person
- 2 **Consider individual patient concerns** when making recommendations
- 3 **Respect patients' life priorities beyond cancer**
- 4 **Offer continual reassurance**
- 5 **Encourage patients to:**
  - ✓ Learn about their disease (Refer to and distribute CSC's *Frankly Speaking About Cancer: Metastatic Breast Cancer* program)
  - ✓ Ask questions (Refer to *Open to Options™*)
  - ✓ Openly share fears/concerns about side effects, symptoms and effects on quality of life
  - ✓ Be honest about how much information they want and how involved they wish to be in making treatment decisions
  - ✓ Be an active partner with their health care team in making decisions
  - ✓ Bring a family member or friend to serve as an extra set of ears and source of support
  - ✓ Take notes

### QUALITY OF LIFE CURTAILED

Metastatic breast cancer and/or treatment side effects can affect patients' functioning, whether it's physically, emotionally, socially or spiritually. Ask your patients if their disease or treatments interfere with their ability to:

- Work (lost income, challenges of disability insurance)
- Sleep
- Think clearly
- Stay emotionally healthy
- Be social/enjoy hobbies
- Maintain close relationships/be present in family life
- Be intimate with partner
- Exercise/be physically active
- Function in other ways

*Good communication is important across the continuum of care.*



## HELPING PATIENTS WEIGH TREATMENT OPTIONS

When asked, most patients say they want to work with their health care team to map out their course of treatment. Still, making decisions about cancer treatments can be overwhelming, and patients often want more support and guidance.

With decision support, patients can:

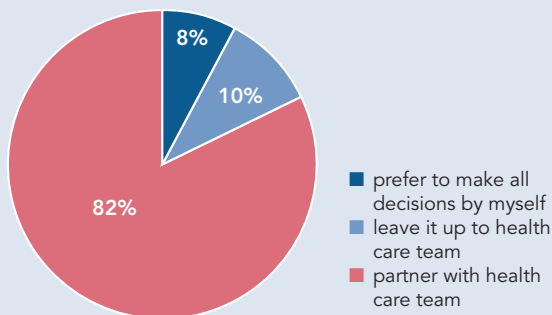
- Clarify their goals and concerns
- More clearly articulate questions
- Benefit from the information provided as a result



CSC's free decision support counseling program *Open to Options™* – can help. A trained specialist works with individuals to develop a personal list of questions and concerns. This list can then be shared with health care providers before or at medical visits.

To set up appointment, call **1-888-793-9355**.

### Patients Want To Be Partners In Decision Making



Source: Cancer Support Community. (2012) "Open to Options™/Advanced breast cancer online survey results report."

## Things to bear in mind when mapping out or evaluating treatments

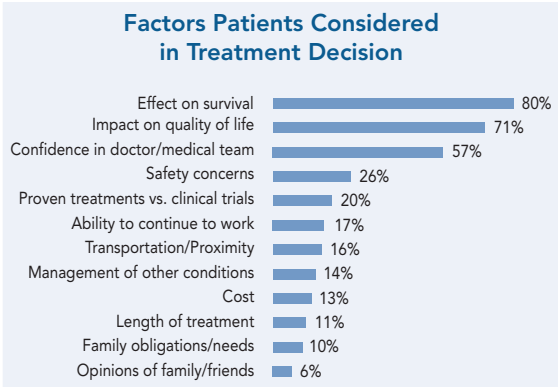
- Understand, consider and respect individual patient goals
- Educate patients about various options, including clinical trials
- Help them weigh the risks and benefits
- Remember that patients need time to think about and process information
- Be mindful that goals often change over time
- Clarify misconceptions (palliative care ≠ dying)
- Decisions are often made when emotions are high

## Treatment Goals

Treatments should aim to:

- Prolong survival
- Delay disease progression
- Manage symptoms
- Maintain function
- Optimize quality of life

Keep in mind, patients say trust and confidence in their health care team are major factors when making decisions.



Source: CSC 2012 survey.

*Patients want to live longer and live well.*

## 7 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PATIENTS

- 1 **How are you feeling in general?**
- 2 **What is worrying you most?**
- 3 **With whom are you able to share these concerns?**
- 4 **How have your symptoms changed since the last visit?**
- 5 **How is the cancer and/or related treatments affecting your life?**
- 6 **What side effects are you experiencing?** What are you doing to manage them? (Note: some patients with metastatic breast cancer may mask their side effects or try to tolerate more discomfort or pain for fear of running out of treatment options)
- 7 **What questions do you have about your cancer or treatment?**

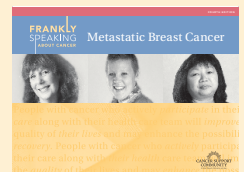
CSC's new worksheet can help patients with metastatic breast cancer prepare to answer these questions and clarify their concerns.

## INFORMATION & RESOURCES

CSC provides resources and tools that can help you improve communication and shared decision making in your everyday practice. For example:

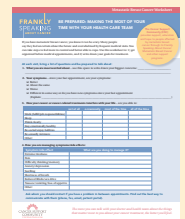
### Frankly Speaking About Cancer: Metastatic Breast Cancer

CSC's highly acclaimed cancer education series provides sound medical and psychosocial information to empower patients and caregivers across the continuum of care. It includes a free book, an online program and patient education workshop.



### Be Prepared: Making the Most of Your Time with Your Health Care Team patient worksheet

This easy-to-use, downloadable worksheet is designed to help patients with metastatic breast cancer get organized before medical visits.



### Health Professional Webinar – Watch it Online Now

For more information, watch CSC's webinar on the needs of metastatic breast cancer patients. *Improving Patient-Provider Communication and Shared Decision Making Webinar* is available at [www.cancersupportcommunity.org/webinars](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/webinars).

