

## 6 Not appropriate to use chemotherapy in patients with metastatic breast cancer who are unlikely to benefit, such as those who have received multiple lines of prior therapy for advanced disease, and with low performance status (3 or 4) or at high risk of toxicity.

### WHAT THIS PRACTICE IS ABOUT

This practice is about the use of chemotherapy for the treatment of metastatic breast cancer. It highlights the importance of making sure that chemotherapy is only given to people who will benefit from its use.

Chemotherapy involves using drugs to treat people with cancer. It is often used in the treatment of metastatic breast cancer to slow down the growth and spread of cancer cells. Chemotherapy is associated with different side effects, some of which can affect day-to-day activities and quality of life. The decision about whether to have chemotherapy involves weighing up the benefits of treatment and the risk of side effects. This decision may be different for different people.

For some people with metastatic breast cancer, the potential risk and severity of side effects outweighs the possible benefits of chemotherapy. When making decisions about whether to use chemotherapy, it is important to consider the person's overall health and any issues that might affect the response to treatment. The decision may also be affected by what other treatments were used previously and whether these were effective.

For some people with metastatic breast cancer, it may be more appropriate to focus on relieving pain and other symptoms rather than continuing to use chemotherapy to try and control the cancer. Involvement of a palliative care team and other supportive care professionals can provide care and support to people in this situation.

### WHY THIS PRACTICE MIGHT BE IMPORTANT FOR YOU

If you have metastatic breast cancer, it is appropriate for you to only receive treatments that have a reasonable chance of being helpful in treating your cancer. Side effects of chemotherapy can affect your day-to-day activities and quality of life. It is important to limit your exposure to side effects of treatments that are unlikely to be effective. The decision not to have chemotherapy may be the right decision if you have already tried several different drugs and these have not been effective, and if it is likely that the side effects will be difficult for you to tolerate.

Depending on what treatments you have used previously and your general health, your doctors may recommend focusing on helping you relieve pain and managing your symptoms rather than using chemotherapy to control your cancer. Involvement of a palliative care team and other supportive care professionals can provide care and support to help you live as well as possible.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK

*What is the evidence about the benefits of this chemotherapy for people in my situation?*

*What are the likely side effects of this chemotherapy? How might this affect my day-to-day activity?*

*What are my treatment and care options if I decide not to have chemotherapy?*

*How could a supportive and palliative care team help me and my family?*

### MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the **Cancer Australia Statement – Influencing best practice in metastatic breast cancer** and to access supporting resources, visit [canceraustralia.gov.au/statement](http://canceraustralia.gov.au/statement)



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# Influencing best practice in metastatic breast cancer

Metastatic breast cancer is cancer that has spread from the breast to other parts of the body. It is also known as advanced breast cancer or secondary breast cancer. People with metastatic breast cancer experience a range of emotional, physical and practical challenges.

The aim of treatment and care for people with metastatic breast cancer is to control the growth and spread of the cancer, relieve symptoms and help people live as well as possible. There is evidence that approaches to treatment and care vary across Australia.

It is important that everyone with metastatic breast cancer receives evidence-based information, treatment and support that reflect their individual needs and preferences. This includes avoiding treatments that may not provide meaningful benefits or may cause harm.

## ABOUT THE STATEMENT

The aim of the *Cancer Australia Statement – Influencing best practice in metastatic breast cancer* is to reduce unwarranted variation in the treatment and care of people with metastatic breast cancer in Australia.

The Statement focuses on 10 practices that have been identified as appropriate or inappropriate in the treatment and care of people with metastatic breast cancer, to help them to live as well as possible. This includes providing the treatment and care that is most likely to benefit the patient, and avoiding treatments that are unlikely to help, or that may be harmful.

Not every practice is relevant for every person diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. The practice(s) relevant to an individual will depend on their diagnosis and situation.

## HOW WAS THE STATEMENT DEVELOPED?

The Statement is based on available national and international evidence and was developed with input from a range of experts and people affected by metastatic breast cancer. The Statement has the support of key clinical colleges, cancer and consumer organisations.

## USING THE STATEMENT

The Statement aims to empower people with metastatic breast cancer and their families to make informed decisions about treatment and care that are right for them. A key part of informed decision making is to talk to health professionals and ask questions about available options for treatment, care and support.

You may wish to talk to your health professionals about which practices in the Statement are most relevant for you. Each practice includes a few questions that you may find helpful to guide conversations about your treatment and care options.

## MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the *Cancer Australia Statement – Influencing best practice in metastatic breast cancer* and to access supporting resources, visit **Cancer Australia** website.



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