

Clinical Trials Revolutionizing Breast Cancer Treatment

(NAPSA)—Thanks to a number of factors, such as clinical trials, a diagnosis of breast cancer is not nearly as devastating as it was a few years ago.

Until the early 1980s, only 25 percent of women with the disease lived more than five years and mastectomy was the only treatment. Research into combining chemotherapy with other cancer-fighting treatments was in its earliest stages and mammography was not yet in use.

Clinical studies over the past 35 years have transformed the way breast cancer is treated. These studies (also known as “trials”) have given researchers the information they need to move new cancer therapies beyond the laboratory and into the hands of doctors and patients. In fact, clinical trials in the past two decades have led to less invasive surgery, new treatment regimens and hormonal therapies to reduce the body’s levels of the hormone estrogen (which some breast cancers depend on for growth). Today, more than 90 percent of all breast cancer patients survive for at least five years.

Still, challenges remain. Not all therapies help all women with breast cancer and side effects can still be difficult to manage with some treatments. Only cancer clinical trials can expand the arsenal of safe, effective breast cancer therapies personalized to tumor type and a woman’s genetic makeup. (The Food and Drug Administration will not approve use of a treatment that has not gone through extensive clinical studies.)

Several important breast cancer trials are currently under way in the United States, and researchers are seeking patients for



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those studies. The trials offer access to state-of-the-art care, but many cancer patients are unaware that clinical trials are a treatment option. Yet a study from the Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups and Northwestern University near Chicago also found that most patients (87 percent) would have considered enrolling had they known about the option at the time of their diagnosis.

The Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups is a nonprofit charitable organization whose mission is to increase participation in cancer clinical trials. Its Web site, www.CancerTrialsHelp.org, answers questions about cancer research, and features TrialCheck®, an online search tool that quickly gives patients access to customized clinical trial information—sorted by cancer type and the patient’s zip code. Patients can then locate hospitals and physicians near their home that offer clinical trials. TrialCheck® also links directly to the American Cancer Society National Cancer Information Center via a toll-free number at (877) 227-8451, where specialists can provide additional assistance on breast cancer and other types of trials.