Metastatic Breast Cancer: The Individualization of Therapy

Suzanne M. Mahon, RN, DNSc, AOCN®, APNG, and Frances M. Palmieri, RN, MSN, OCN®, CCRP

The goals of breast cancer therapy are to reduce the risk of disease recurrence, minimize toxicity, and improve overall survival. Recent advances in research of the biology of breast cancer tumors have resulted in more targeted therapies. The therapies can increase survival and help maintain the quantity and quality of life for patients with metastatic breast cancer. The targeted therapies for breast cancers that are HER2 positive are presented, including the indications and expected benefits for patients and implications for nurses involved in the care of such patients. Emerging research in triple-negative breast cancer also is discussed.

At a Glance

- The goal of targeted therapy is to provide optimal treatment for specific breast cancer subtypes based on biologic characteristics of the tumor.
- Women with HER2-positive breast cancer may benefit from treatment with trastuzumab or lapatinib.
- Research is under way into treatment for triple-negative breast cancer—estrogen receptor negative, progesterone receptor negative, and HER2 negative.

Considerations for Individualizing Therapy

To optimize treatment for any cancer, the ability to predict how a patient will respond to a given therapy is invaluable. Pathology results, previous treatments, and medical history can provide information that is an important component in developing an effective, individualized treatment plan.