

# Information and Support Needs of Adolescent Children of Women With Breast Cancer

Linda J. Kristjanson, RN, PhD, Karen I. Chalmers, RN, PhD,  
and Roberta Woodgate, RN, PhD

**Purpose/Objectives:** To elicit detailed descriptions of adolescents' information and support needs in response to their mothers' breast cancer.

**Design:** Exploratory, qualitative.

**Setting:** Four different outpatient and inpatient oncology settings in western Canada.

**Sample:** 31 adolescent children of women in five illness phases.

**Methods:** 27 semistructured interviews and two focus groups were conducted. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed using constant comparison techniques. The Communication Subscale of the McMaster Family Assessment Device also was administered to assess family communication patterns.

**Findings:** Information needs were sources of information, information content, degree of helpfulness, and information timing. Support needs were type, degree of helpfulness, form, and source.

**Conclusion:** Most of the adolescents reported that their needs were poorly met.

**Implications for Nursing:** Women with breast cancer have a need for family-focused care. Further research is required to develop interventions that can assist nurses in providing care that meets the needs of adolescent children and other family members of women with breast cancer.

## Key Points . . .

- ▶ The emotional impact of a mother's breast cancer on adolescents is significant.
- ▶ Assessment of the needs of adolescents of women with breast cancer and their families is minimal.
- ▶ Specific individualized interventions are indicated to address the needs of these adolescents.

programs designed to assist children of patients with cancer suggest that children find these programs effective and evaluate them positively (Adams-Greenley, Shiminisky-Maher, McGowan, & Meyers, 1986; Berger, 1984; Christ, Siegel, Mesagno, & Langosch, 1991; Taylor-Brown, Acheson, & Faber, 1993). However, very little systematic research has been conducted on adolescents' support needs and the formal and informal supports they consider helpful as they cope with their mothers' breast cancer experiences.

This study was designed to describe the information and support needs of adolescent children of women with breast cancer. Three specific research questions guided the study.

- What are the information and support needs of adolescent children of women with breast cancer?
- Do adolescents' needs for information and support vary according to the stage of their mothers' illnesses and the gender and developmental stages of the adolescents?
- To what extent do adolescents perceive that their information and support needs are met?

*Linda J. Kristjanson, RN, PhD, is a professor in the School of Nursing at Edith Cowan University in Churchlands, Perth, Western Australia; Karen I. Chalmers, RN, PhD, is a professor and Roberta Woodgate, RN, PhD, is an assistant professor, both in the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. This project was funded by the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Initiative and the Manitoba Health Research Council in the form of a career scholar award to the first author. (Submitted May 2002. Accepted for publication February 4, 2003.)*

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Although many studies on the impact of cancer on adult family members have identified the importance of information needs (Kristjanson, 1986, 1989; Wright & Dyck, 1984), little is known about the information needs of adolescent children of women with breast cancer. Much of the existing literature covers parents' perspectives of their children's needs (Barnes et al., 2000; Shands, Lewis, & Zahlis, 2000). Some evidence can be found in the empirical literature that children's information needs vary according to age (Lewis, 1990; Lewis, Ellison, & Woods, 1985). However, specific knowledge about the type and amount of information helpful to adolescent children of women with breast cancer is limited.

The social support network within which individuals manage life crises has been shown to influence adaptation (Berman, Cragg, & Kuenzig, 1988; Kirschling, Tilden, & Butterfield, 1990; Maunsell, Brisson, & Deschenes, 1993; Morrow, Hoagland, & Morse, 1982). Adolescents have a developmental need to feel separate and independent from their parents, and peer relationships play a critical role in their daily lives. As a result, adolescents may have unique support needs as they cope with their mothers' illnesses (Bowen, 1976; Lewis, 1990; Lewis et al., 1985). Anecdotal reports of support