

Psychosocial support needs of women with breast cancer in the Waikato region

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Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer among women and the third most common cancer in New Zealand. Despite improved survival rates, significant psychosocial distress is experienced by breast cancer patients. To address this, the Cancer Psychological and Social Support Service (CPSSS) provides supportive care to cancer patients and their families. We aimed to understand the characteristics and psychosocial support needs of women with breast cancer who were referred to the CPSSS at the Waikato District Health

Board (WDHB). Breast cancer data from 2016 to 2018 was obtained from the Waikato Breast Cancer Register (WBCR) and compared to psychosocial support referrals from the CPSSS for the same period.

Statistical regression was performed to compare the characteristics of those referred and not referred to CPSSS. Thematic analysis identified the main referral themes. A total of 95 (10%) of the 998 women identified with stage 0–IV breast cancer in the WBCR were referred to CPSSS. Women were more likely to be referred if they were younger, had a mastectomy or no surgery, and had received radiotherapy. Older women, and women with stage 0 cancer were less likely to seek support. Ethnicity, mode of detection, rurality, chemotherapy, endocrine therapy and reconstructive surgery were not significant factors in whether women sought psychosocial support. Treatment concerns were the most common reason for referral. The median length of time in the service was 98 days. While CPSSS is still a relatively new service in a range of other cancer support services, the 10% referral rate may be a reflection of an unmet need for psychosocial support provision in the Waikato region. Younger women, women undergoing mastectomy, those not receiving surgery and women receiving radiotherapy may in particular benefit from psychosocial support.