

# A viable treatment option for some breast cancers, even after spread

By ACSH Staff — July 20, 2011

A study just published in *Clinical Cancer Research* has [confirmed](#) <sup>[1]</sup> that treating HER2-positive metastatic breast cancer with the drug trastuzumab (Herceptin) is as effective as chemotherapy or surgery. Of particular interest is that the drug can treat metastases involving the brain, often a problem with chemotherapy, since many drugs cannot penetrate the blood-brain barrier. All three of these options increased survival time significantly, from an average of six months without any treatment to an average of 18 months with treatment. The average survival time allowed by trastuzumab was 17.5 months.

The findings come from a group of researchers at the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, led by Dr. Adam Brufsky. In order to evaluate the incidence, potential risk factors, and outcomes for patients with this variety of breast cancer, the group used data from registHER, a prospective, observational study of 1,023 women newly diagnosed with HER2-positive metastatic breast cancer (which comprises about a quarter of all breast cancers). Nearly 400 of the women had brain metastases at the time the study began.

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom says that it's surprising that trastuzumab is not superior to chemotherapy or surgery for HER2 cancers, since that's what it was designed for. However, he observes that the addition of another treatment option for women with breast cancer is always a good thing.

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[1] [http://www.mdnews.com/news/hd/2011\\_30/hd\\_654927](http://www.mdnews.com/news/hd/2011_30/hd_654927)