

10 THINGS

To Know At Diagnosis

Recurrence of breast cancer continues to be one of the most feared diseases among women.

A diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer can come as a shock and be frightening, as it means you'll live with cancer for the rest of your life. But, through active management of the disease, many people are able to live full, productive lives.

THE FOLLOWING ARE 10 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU LOVE HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH METASTATIC BREAST CANCER.

- 1** Metastatic breast cancer (MBC), also known as stage IV breast cancer, is a form of breast cancer that has spread to other parts of the body (eg, lungs, liver, bones). It may be located in other organs outside of the breast and/or lymph nodes near the breast.
- 2** Breast cancer that has spread to other parts of the body (metastasized) is not the same as cancer of these organs. When cancer spreads to another organ, it retains the characteristics of the original organ, so treatment and chances of remission relate to the primary tumor site.
- 3** It can take a few days or even a couple of weeks to know if you have MBC, as there are a number of tests (eg, scans or biopsies) needed to confirm the diagnosis. While this can be frustrating, knowing the pathology of the disease is critical to help determine the appropriate treatment plan.
- 4** Currently there are four primary molecular subtypes of MBC that have been identified: Luminal A or HR+/HER2- (HR-positive/HER2-negative), Luminal B or HR+/HER2+ (HR-positive/HER2-positive), Triple negative or HR-/HER2- (HR-negative/HER2-negative), and HER2-positive. In addition to molecular subtype, HR status and HER2 expression may help provide a better understanding of patients across the spectrum of HER2.
- 5** Treatment of MBC can be highly personalized based on the tumor type, as well as factors like where and how the cancer has spread, your overall health and experience with prior treatments. The most important thing is to stay focused and determine what you need to do to help inform treatment decisions and determine which options may be right for you.
- 6** Breast cancer that has metastasized may not have the exact same characteristics as the original tumor. For example, cancer that was ER+ at diagnosis may now be ER-. This is another reason your treatment may differ from previous breast cancer treatments.
- 7** MBC is a chronic, progressive illness, so it is important to work closely with your medical team to actively manage the disease. The goal for treatment is to help remain stable and slow down the cancer progression, to keep the disease under control while trying to maintain quality of life.
- 8** If you've had a prior diagnosis of breast cancer, it is important to not question your prior treatment decisions or feel guilty about deciding against certain courses of treatment. The most important thing is to stay focused and work with your doctor to determine options that may help manage your disease.
- 9** Do not feel rushed into making decisions about your care. When we are anxious we may not process information clearly, and need time to be comfortable with a treatment decision. Always have thoughtful discussions with your medical team, and do not hesitate if you wish to seek a second opinion.
- 10** It is important for your loved ones to also be educated about the disease, treatment options and what to expect. The more they know, the better they can support you in this journey.