

Media Release

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Herceptin patients out of pocket for heart monitoring

MELBOURNE: Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) will release research today (10/11) showing hundreds of women with breast cancer are unnecessarily paying hundreds of dollars extra for life saving treatment.

Herceptin is a targeted treatment that has proven to be highly effective in the treatment of women with HER2-positive early breast cancer, however it requires regular compulsory heart monitoring because of one of the side-effects of the drug.

“Heart monitoring before and during treatment is a Government requirement for women with early breast cancer who are prescribed Herceptin through the PBS,” BCNA CEO Lyn Swinburne said.

“However, our survey shows that 40 per cent of women reported incurring significant out of pocket expenses to complete the four mandatory tests. In some cases these totalled more than \$1000.”

Ms Swinburne said the survey of BCNA members currently being treated or who had previously been treated with Herceptin found most (60%) were referred for a Multi Gated Acquisition scan (also called a gated heart pool scan), with the remainder (40%) referred for an echocardiogram.

“We were pleased to see that almost all women (99%) said their doctor referred them for heart monitoring tests during their treatment and explained the potential risks associated with Herceptin.

“However, it was disappointing to find that many patients, including women in difficult financial circumstances, were faced with significant additional costs that with the right advice might have been avoided. “For example, some women reported they were able to avoid an out-of-pocket cost by having their heart tests on the same days as their Herceptin infusions.”

Ms Swinburne said BCNA was calling on breast cancer oncologists and health professionals to ensure that women prescribed Herceptin were informed of the available options for compulsory heart testing so that they were not unnecessarily subjected to additional costs.

"We urge health professionals to provide women with the information that will enable them to make the best possible choice, both physically and financially," she said.

The research will be presented at 11.10am today (10 Nov) at the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia Annual Scientific Meeting. Rooms 105/6, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

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