

Chronic pain from breast cancer treatment: A functional approach to management

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Background:

Breast cancer treatment with aromatase inhibitors is a mainstay of treatment in both the adjuvant and metastatic setting. It is associated with severe myalgias and arthralgias, sometimes requiring discontinuation of therapy. The mechanism of pain from these agents is thought to be related to the abrupt decrease in estrogen and associated inflammation.

Case:

Patient is a 44 year old woman with metastatic breast cancer to bones, currently with negative PET scan. She is on aromatase inhibitor (trigger) and has severe arthralgias, myalgias, fatigue, and insomnia.

Methods:

Using the matrix, we used a systems approach to her constellations of symptoms.

We addressed the mediators of insomnia, stress, and inflammation. 1) Defense and repair: added curcumin, fish oil for inflammation. 2) Mental/emotional/spiritual: discussed how her diagnosis was isolating and techniques for coping 3) Transport/structural integrity: increased exercise

We reviewed modifiable personal lifestyle factors; adding melatonin for sleep, stress reduction techniques, meditation.

Results:

Patient at 2 month follow up has decreased pain, less insomnia and fatigue has resolved. She has increased her exercise to 6/7 days per week without any fatigue or pain. Her QOL overall has improved. MSQ score improved from 75 to 59.

Conclusion:

Cancer patients often have complex pain syndromes that are related to the cancer itself or anti-cancer medications. This case study shows that pain and associated symptoms triggered by aromatase inhibition can be successfully treated without non-steroidal medications or narcotics using a basic functional medicine approach.