

## Breast Cancer Following Hodgkin's Disease: The Experience of the University of Florence

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■ **Abstract:** The advent of effective chemo-radiotherapy has made Hodgkin Disease (HD) a highly curable malignancy, but the great improvement in survival rates allowed the observation in long-term survivors of several treatment complications. Secondary malignancies are the most serious complications and breast cancer (BC) represents the most common solid tumor among female survivors. The aim of our analysis is to describe the clinico-pathological characteristics and management of BC occurred after HD treatment. Between 1960 and 2003, 2,039 patients were treated for HD at the Department of Radiotherapy-Oncology of the Florence University. In this study we considered 1,538 patients on whom a minimum follow up of 6 months had been obtained. Of these, 725 were women. The most represented histological subtype was nodular sclerosis (50.6%). Supradiaphragmatic alone or with subdiaphragmatic complementary extended field radiotherapy was delivered to 83.1% of patients while supradiaphragmatic involved field radiotherapy was delivered to 10.7% of patients. Concerning the characteristics and incidence of BC, we focused our analysis exclusively on the female group. We found that BC occurred in 39, with an overall incidence of 5.4%. The mean interval after Hodgkin treatment was 19.5 years (SD ± 9.0). The median age of BC diagnosis was 50.8 years (SD ± 13.3) while the median age of Hodgkin diagnosis was 31.2 years (SD ± 14.5). Thirty-seven women received mediastinal irradiation. We observed a decreasing trend of the secondary BC incidence with increasing age of Hodgkin treatment with the maximum incidence registered in women treated at age 20 or younger. In Our Institute we perform a whole life follow up and recommend that annual mammography begins 10 years after HD treatment or, in any case, not later than age 40. ■

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**Key words:** breast cancer, Hodgkin's disease, late effects, screening, secondary malignancies

The advent of effective radiotherapy (RT) first and later of combined chemo-radiotherapy has made Hodgkin Disease (HD) a highly curable malignancy. This has been one of the most relevant success of oncology (1–3). The great improvement in survival rates after therapy for HD allowed the observation in long-term survivors of several treatment complications. In these patients, treatment-related toxicity surpasses HD as the greatest contributor to overall mortality (4). Secondary malignancies (SM) are the most serious complications characterized by important

morbidity and mortality. Many studies have demonstrated a significant increasing risk of secondary acute non-lymphocytic leukemia, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and solid tumors (ST) among HD patients (5–7). In particular, breast cancer (BC) remains the most common SM among female survivors, especially in those treated at young ages with supradiaphragmatic RT (8–13). Anyhow, at the present time, combined chemo-radiotherapy seems to be optimal both for most early stage HD patients and for advanced stages (14–16). The aim of our analysis is to quantify the overall incidence and to describe the clinico-pathological characteristics and management of BC occurred after HD treatment in female patients at the Department of Radiation-Oncology of the Florence University.

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**Table 1. Distribution of 1,538 Cases of Hodgkin Disease (HD) According to Selected Clinical and Pathologic Characteristics**

| Characteristic                         | n (%)       |
|--|-------------|
| Gender                                 |             |
| Female                                 | 725 (47.1)  |
| Male                                   | 813 (52.9)  |
| Age groups (years)                     |             |
| ≤30                                    | 706 (45.9)  |
| 30.1–40                                | 322 (20.9)  |
| >40                                    | 510 (33.2)  |
| Clinical stage                         |             |
| I                                      | 248 (16.1)  |
| II                                     | 840 (54.6)  |
| III                                    | 363 (23.6)  |
| IV                                     | 87 (5.7)    |
| Histological type*                     |             |
| Nodular sclerosis                      | 655 (50.6)  |
| Mixed cellularity                      | 445 (34.4)  |
| Lymphocyte predominance                | 139 (10.7)  |
| Lymphocyte depletion                   | 55 (4.3)    |
| General symptoms                       |             |
| A                                      | 1150 (74.8) |
| B                                      | 388 (25.2)  |
| ESR                                    |             |
| Normal                                 | 637 (41.4)  |
| Abnormal                               | 901 (58.6)  |
| Site of presentation                   |             |
| Mediastinum                            | 860 (63.4)  |
| Supradiaphragmatic without mediastinum | 577 (37.8)  |
| Subdiaphragmatic                       | 90 (5.9)    |
| Extranodal                             | 2 (0.1)     |
| Extension                              |             |
| No                                     | 1333 (86.7) |
| Yes                                    | 205 (13.3)  |
| Site of extension                      |             |
| Lung                                   | 76 (37.2)   |
| Bone                                   | 46 (22.4)   |
| Cutaneous                              | 29 (14.2)   |
| Liver                                  | 21 (10.2)   |
| Pleura                                 | 6 (2.9)     |
| Multiple                               | 6 (2.9)     |
| Others                                 | 21 (10.2)   |
| Staging laparotomy                     |             |
| No                                     | 861 (56.0)  |
| Yes                                    | 677 (44.0)  |
| Primary treatment                      |             |
| Only RT                                | 833 (54.3)  |
| RT–CHT                                 | 573 (37.2)  |
| Only CHT                               | 132 (8.5)   |
| RT treated volumes                     |             |
| Submantle                              | 85 (6.1)    |
| Mantle                                 | 897 (63.8)  |
| Subdiaphragmatic EF                    | 76 (5.4)    |
| Mediastinal IF                         | 62 (4.4)    |
| Cervical and/or axillary IF            | 88 (6.3)    |
| Subdiaphragmatic IF                    | 17 (1.2)    |
| Total nodal irradiation                | 181 (12.9)  |
| Radiotherapy                           |             |
| Supradiaphragmatic EF                  | 1163 (82.7) |
| Supradiaphragmatic IF                  | 150 (10.7)  |
| Subdiaphragmatic alone                 | 93 (6.6)    |
| Chemotherapy                           |             |
| MOPP                                   | 361 (23.4)  |
| ABVD                                   | 296 (19.2)  |
| Other regimens                         | 48 (3.1)    |
| No CHT                                 | 833 (54.3)  |

**Table 1. (Continued)**

| Characteristic           | n (%)      |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Number of cycles of CHT† |            |
| 1–3                      | 138 (20.1) |
| 4–6                      | 450 (65.7) |
| 7+                       | 97 (14.2)  |

RT, radiotherapy; CHT, chemotherapy; EF, extended field; IF, involved field; ESR, erythrocyte sedimentation rate.

\*Histological data not available for 244 cases.

†Data on CHT cycles not available for 20 cases subjected to CHT.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this retrospective study, we analyzed the development of BC in patients previously treated for HD at the Department of Radiation-Oncology of the Florence University. Between 1960 and 2003, 2,039 patients were treated for HD. The patients' data were obtained from the Institute clinical database. All parameters were not always exhaustive, especially in older cases. Moreover, we considered only patients with a minimum follow up of 6 months. The statistical analysis was conducted on 1,538 patients; among them, 725 were women. The BC incidence data relate to the female group only. In the whole group, according to Ann Arbor's classification, we registered early stages (Stage I-II) in the 70.7% of the patients and advanced stages (Stage III-IV) in the 29.3%. The most represented histological subtype was nodular sclerosis (50.6%). At presentation 54.3% of the patients received exclusive RT and 37.2% combined chemoradiotherapy. Supradiaphragmatic alone or with subdiaphragmatic complementary extended field radiotherapy (EFRT) was delivered to 82.7% of patients; the delivered dose was in the range of 36–40 Gy with conventional fractionation. Supradiaphragmatic involved field radiotherapy (IFRT) was delivered to 10.7% of patients; the maximum dose to the involved nodal regions was 30 Gy, with conventional fractionation. The median age at diagnosis of HD for the women was 30.3 years (range 10–85 years). The complete patients HD characteristics and management are summarized in Table 1. Patients were followed up from the diagnosis until death; during the first year after the end of the treatment, they received a clinical examination every 3 months, and thereafter every 6 months until the fifth year. Then, they have been asked to come for follow up visits every 2 years. At time of writing, at a median follow up of 15.6 years (range 0.5–48 years), 1,141 patients had no evidence of HD. The complete distribution of

**Table 2. Distribution of 1,538 Cases of Hodgkin Disease (HD) According to Relapse Occurrence and Vital Status**

| Characteristic                     | n (%)       |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Relapse                            |             |
| No                                 | 958 (62.3)  |
| Yes                                | 580 (37.7)  |
| Type of relapse                    |             |
| True                               | 221 (38.1)  |
| Marginal                           | 52 (9.0)    |
| Extended                           | 144 (24.8)  |
| Dissemination                      | 142 (24.5)  |
| Unknown                            | 21 (3.6)    |
| Time occurrence of relapse (years) |             |
| <1                                 | 165 (28.4)  |
| 1–2                                | 160 (27.6)  |
| 2.1–3                              | 85 (14.7)   |
| 3.1–4                              | 50 (8.6)    |
| 4.1–5                              | 29 (5.0)    |
| >5                                 | 91 (15.7)   |
| Vital status                       |             |
| Alive                              | 1141 (74.2) |
| Died of HD                         | 397 (25.8)  |

HD, Hodgkin disease.

our series according to relapse occurrence and vital status is summarized in Table 2.

### Statistical analyses

Clinico-pathological data collected for each patient was linked to vital status information. For the survival analysis, the date of HD diagnosis was used as the start of observation. Survival time was calculated from the date of HD diagnosis to the date of last follow-up or date of death. Disease free survival time is defined as survival without HD relapse, and was calculated from the date of HD diagnosis to the date of HD relapse. We also calculated the time of BC occurrence from the date of HD diagnosis to the date of BC occurrence. The crude cumulative probability of BC occurrence at the end of follow-up was estimated by using the Kaplan–Meier method and differences between patient groups were assessed by the log-rank test. Cumulative probability comparisons were carried out using Cox proportional hazard regression models. Estimated relative risks of BC occurrence were expressed as cumulative probability (CP) and corresponding 95% confidence intervals (95% CI). Univariate models were performed to evaluate the effect of each specific parameter. Multivariate regression models were used to test the independent effect of the parameters included in the Cox models. Statistical results were considered significant at a *p*-value <0.05. All statistical tests

were performed by SAS software (Statistical Analysis Software, Cary, NC).

## RESULTS

We found that, among the female group, BC occurred in 39 patients, with an incidence of 5.4%. No cases of BC were observed in 813 male patients. The incidence for the entire group is 2.5%. Concerning these 39 female patients, the mean interval after HD treatment was 19.5 years (SD ± 9.0). The median age of BC was 50.8 years (SD ± 13.3), while the median age of HD diagnosis was 31.2 years (SD ± 14.5). Thirty-seven women received mediastinal RT, all, except one, with EFRT. Most of the patients developed BC after more than 20 years from HD diagnosis (48.8%). Three patients had bone metastasis at diagnosis of BC. In more than two-third of cases BC's histotype is ductal infiltrating. HER-2 receptor status was available only for fifteen patients and was negative in all cases. The main clinico-pathological features of patients are summarized in Table 3. Concerning BC outcome, at the time of writing, at a median follow up of 2.5 years (range 0.5–25 years), 21 patients have no disease evidence. Six patients developed local recurrence and twelve patients developed distant metastasis; all these patients died for BC after advanced BC multimodality treatment. The main results of BC cumulative probability at the end of the follow-up of 725 HD female cases according to selected individual characteristics are summarized in Table 4. Despite Cox regression univariate analysis does not reach any statistical significance for any of the parameters evaluated, we observed a decreasing trend of the secondary BC incidence with increasing age of HD treatment. The maximum incidence is observed in women treated at age 20 or younger (CP: 50.8; 95% CI: 19.8–91.3). In addition, multivariate analysis do not reach statistical significance (data not shown).

## DISCUSSION

Improvements in the management of HD have resulted in a large number of long-term survivors, with an increased risk of treatment-induced SM, which are currently the primary cause of mortality among these patients (4,17–21).

Several different factors are involved in the development of SM, such as exposure to radiation therapy (7,13,22), selected chemotherapy agents (23–25),

**Table 3. Characteristics of 39 Breast Cancer (BC) Diagnosed During the Hodgkin Disease (HD) Follow-up**

| Characteristic                         | n (%)     |
|--|-----------|
| Time occurrence of BC after HD (years) |           |
| <5                                     | 2 (5.1)   |
| 5–10                                   | 4 (10.3)  |
| 10.1–15                                | 7 (17.9)  |
| 15.1–20                                | 7 (17.9)  |
| >20                                    | 19 (48.8) |
| HD treatment                           |           |
| RT                                     | 29 (74.4) |
| RT + CHT                               | 8 (20.5)  |
| CHT                                    | 2 (5.1)   |
| Radiotherapy for HD                    |           |
| Supradiaphragmatic IF                  | 1 (2.7)   |
| Supradiaphragmatic EF                  | 36 (97.3) |
| Infradiaphragmatic                     | –         |
| Histotype                              |           |
| Ductal infiltrating                    | 26 (66.7) |
| Lobular infiltrating                   | 6 (15.4)  |
| Ductal in situ                         | 4 (10.3)  |
| Lobular in situ                        | 3 (7.7)   |
| T stage                                |           |
| Tis                                    | 7 (17.9)  |
| 1                                      | 13 (33.3) |
| 2                                      | 14 (35.9) |
| 3                                      | 4 (10.3)  |
| 4                                      | 1 (2.6)   |
| Node involved                          |           |
| 0                                      | 31 (79.5) |
| 1–3                                    | 6 (15.4)  |
| >3                                     | 2 (5.1)   |
| Hormonal receptors                     |           |
| ER+/PgR+                               | 20 (62.5) |
| ER-/PgR+                               | 3 (9.3)   |
| ER-/PgR-                               | 9 (28.2)  |
| Surgery                                |           |
| Conservative                           | 17 (43.6) |
| Mastectomy                             | 22 (56.3) |
| Adjuvant RT                            |           |
| No                                     | 29 (74.4) |
| Yes                                    | 10 (25.6) |
| Adjuvant CHT                           |           |
| No                                     | 25 (64.1) |
| Yes                                    | 14 (35.9) |
| Adjuvant HT                            |           |
| No                                     | 17 (43.6) |
| Yes                                    | 22 (56.4) |

BC, breast cancer; HD, Hodgkin disease; RT, radiotherapy; CHT, chemotherapy; HT, hormone therapy; EF, extended field; IF, involved field; ER, estrogen receptor; Pgr, progesterone receptor.

hormonal factors (26,27) or genetic influences (28). The majority of previous studies proved that supradiaphragmatic nodal region RT is one of the most important risk factors for BC among women treated for HD (8–10,29–32).

Breast cancer is the most common ST among HD survivors women (33). In our analysis we showed a median interval after HD diagnosis of 19.5 years, a median age at BC diagnosis of 50.8 years and the most represented BC histotype was ductal infiltrating,

**Table 4. Breast Cancer (BC) Cumulative Probability in the Follow-up of 725 Hodgkin Disease (HD) Female Cases According to Selected Individual Characteristics: Number of Patients at Risk, Number of BC, Cumulative Probability (CP) at the End of Follow-up and Corresponding 95% Confidence Intervals (95% CI), and Log Rank Test**

| Variable                    | At start | BC | CP   | 95% CI    | Log rank test |
|-----------------------------|----------|----|------|-----------|---------------|
| Age at HD diagnosis (years) |          |    |      |           |               |
| ≤20                         | 140      | 10 | 50.8 | 19.8–91.3 | 0.33          |
| 20.1–30                     | 217      | 15 | 30.7 | 17.2–50.9 |               |
| 30.1–40                     | 161      | 5  | 8.0  | 3.2–19.5  |               |
| >40                         | 207      | 9  | 17.8 | 8.1–36.4  |               |
| HD treatment                |          |    |      |           |               |
| RT                          | 408      | 29 | 31.1 | 17.5–51.4 | 0.82          |
| RT + CHT                    | 266      | 8  | 25.2 | 8.9–59.3  |               |
| CHT                         | 51       | 2  | 7.6  | 1.8–27.9  |               |
| Radiotherapy                |          |    |      |           |               |
| Supradiaphragmatic IF       | 79       | 1  | 3.6  | 0.5–22.8  | 0.32          |
| Supradiaphragmatic EF       | 575      | 36 | 39.1 | 20.2–66.3 |               |
| Infradiaphragmatic          | 20       | –  | –    | –         |               |
| CHT†                        |          |    |      |           |               |
| No CHT                      | 408      | 29 | 31.1 | 17.5–51.4 | 0.99          |
| ABVD                        | 136      | 7  | 20.0 | 7.6–46.6  |               |
| MOPP                        | 166      | 2  | 3.2  | 0.7–14.0  |               |
| Total                       | 725      | 39 | 31.2 |           |               |

BC, breast cancer; HD, Hodgkin disease; RT, radiotherapy; CHT, chemotherapy; EF, extended field; IF, involved field; CP, cumulative probability.  
†Excluding other CHT.

in agreement with what previously reported (9,22,27,34,35).

One of the most important prognostic factor seems to be the patients' age at HD treatment. Our data show a clear decreasing trend of the secondary BC incidence with increasing age of HD treatment, even though not statistically significant. The largest excesses of BC are observed among women diagnosed with HD at age 30 or younger, especially those younger than 20 (2,9,10,25,26,31,35–37), a pattern that is consistent with the known radiosensitivity of the breast at young ages (38). There is no significant increase of BC risk, compared to general population, in women treated after 35 years of age (33,39).

Breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed malignancy amongst women in the United States, with a lifetime risk in the general population of 13.4% (40). The age-standardized rates for the incidence of BC in the general population is 66.2 per 100,000 for France, 65.4 per 100,000 for Italy and 63.4 per 100,000 for UK (41).

In a relevant review, Horwich and Swerdlow (42) examined the evidences in order to understand factors contributing to the risk and to develop a logical and efficient method for medical management of patients

at higher risk. They concluded that, for those women requiring supradiaphragmatic radiotherapy at ages less than 30 years, it is important to minimize dose and limit volume of breast tissue in the field.

In some recent works (43,44) an attempt was made to quantify the reduction in dose to normal tissues associated with modern RT practice for patients with mediastinal HD and the subsequent expected reduction in SM using radiobiological cancer-risk models (45–47). Hodgson et al. (43) demonstrated that the median predicted 20-year excess relative risk (ERR) of BC for women treated at age 20 with 35 Gy mantle EFRT was 4.8 and this risk was predicted to decline to 1.8 after 35 Gy IFRT. The transition to IFRT was predicted to cause similar proportional reductions in the ERR of BC among women treated at age 30, where the median 20-year ERR of BC declined from 2.1 to 0.8. Koh et al. (44) underlined how compared to 35 Gy mantle RT, the median mean breast doses from 35 Gy IFRT were significantly reduced by 64% and this fact is predicted to reduce the ERR for female BC by approximately 65%. The significant decrease estimated for radiation-induced SM risk associated with modern RT, caused EFRT for HD to have been largely replaced by IFRT. New clinical trials are investigating even smaller treatment volumes with involved-node RT (48). Our data do not allow to compare the role of modern RT techniques to the standard treatment, since only one of the 37 patients treated with radiation therapy received IFRT and in our Institution IFRT has been delivered only in the last 10 years. It will be possible to draw a conclusion about this point only at a longer follow up of these patients.

Considering the correlation between secondary BC and HD treatment, to identify the optimal screening strategy for HD survivors appears to be a key point. This is still not well established and practice guidelines vary widely in the recommended use of screening mammography (31,49,50). A large volume of literature showed that the increased rate of secondary BC emerges following a latency of 10 years and persists beyond 25 years of follow-up (8,9,19,20,34). Evaluating the radiation risk from mammography versus the benefit from breast screening (51,52), the majority of Authors suggests that annual mammography screening should begin within 10 years after HD treatment (8,9,12,13,31–35,53). Contrast-enhanced MRI is a new and sensitive modality in detecting BC in young women and women with dense breasts. MRI's role may become

even more important, as MRI developments improve sensitivity of this imaging modality (50,54–58).

In conclusion, despite techniques of administering RT have become more refined over time in an effort to reduce treatment-related damages, it should be remembered that BCs seen today reflect the treatment methods for HD of more than 20 years ago. In Our Institute we perform a whole life follow up. We suggest frequent breast self-examination and we recommend that annual mammography screening begins 10 years after HD treatment or, in any case, not later than age 40.

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