

## YOUNG WOMEN AND BREAST CANCER

Breast cancer in young women is not simply a disease diagnosed at a young age. Rather, it has biological characteristics and treatment concerns that differ from breast cancer diagnosed in postmenopausal women. Since 1998, Young Survival Coalition (YSC) has dedicated itself to improving and extending life for all young women with breast cancer.

### THE FACTS

Despite common misconceptions, young women **can** and **do** get breast cancer. Here are the startling facts:

- Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women ages 15 to 39.<sup>1</sup>
- There is currently no effective breast cancer screening tool for women 40 and younger, most of whom have dense breast tissue that prevents routine mammograms from being a useful screening tool.
- Nearly 80 percent of young women diagnosed with breast cancer find their breast abnormality themselves.<sup>2</sup>
- The American Cancer Society projects 231,840 new cases of invasive breast cancer among U.S. women annually, as well as an estimated 60,290 additional cases of in situ breast cancer.<sup>3</sup>
  - It is estimated that 12,150 cases of breast cancer will be in women under age 40.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 26,393 women will be under 45 years of age when diagnosed.<sup>4</sup>
  - It is projected that more than 1,000 women under age 40 will die from breast cancer each year.<sup>3</sup>
- Young women are more likely to have aggressive subtypes of breast cancer, including triple negative and HER2+ disease<sup>5</sup>, larger tumor sizes and higher incidence of lymph node involvement.<sup>6</sup>
- Today, there are an estimated 250,000 breast cancer survivors living in the U.S. who were diagnosed at age 40 or younger.<sup>7</sup>

### THE ISSUES

Young women diagnosed with breast cancer face a myriad of issues that may significantly impact their quality and length of life. These issues are often amplified for women diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, including:

- **Lack of research:** As the incidence of young women with breast cancer is much lower than in older women, young women are often underrepresented in research studies.
- **Pregnancy:** Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women who are pregnant or have recently given birth,<sup>8</sup> occurring once in every 3,000 pregnancies.<sup>9</sup> An estimated 30 percent or more of all breast cancer in young women is diagnosed in the few years after a woman has had a baby.<sup>10</sup>
- **Early onset menopause:** Chemotherapy and hormonal treatments can sometimes bring on premature menopause, which can significantly impact quality of life.
- **Fertility:** Breast cancer treatment may affect a woman's ability and plans to have children.
- **Child rearing:** Many young women are raising small children while enduring treatment and subsequent side effects.
- **Financial challenges:** Breast cancer can dramatically impact a young woman's financial stability due to workplace issues, lack of sufficient health insurance and the cost of cancer care.
- **Body image:** It is challenging for some women to embrace their new body after breast cancer-related surgery.
- **Relationships and dating:** Whether married or single, intimacy issues may arise for women diagnosed with breast cancer.

#### Citations

1. Archie Bleyer et al., "The distinctive biology of cancer in adolescents and young adults," *Nature Reviews Cancer* 8 (2008). 2. Ruddy, K. et al., "Presentation of breast cancer in young women," *Journal of Clinical Oncology* 27:15S (2009). 3. American Cancer Society. *Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2015-2016*. 4. "SEER Stat Fact Sheets: Breast," National Cancer Institute, accessed May 21, 2013 <http://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/breast.html>. 5. Carey K. Anders et al., "Breast Carcinomas Arising at a Young Age: Unique Biology or a Surrogate for Aggressive Intrinsic Subtypes?" *Journal of Clinical Oncology* 29:1 (2011). 6. Carey K. Anders et al., "Young Age at Diagnosis Correlates with Worse Prognosis and Defines a Subset of Breast Cancers with Shared Patterns of Gene Expression," *Journal of Clinical Oncology* 26:20 (2008). 7. Based on U.S. Census, 2000. 8. "Pregnancy and Breast Cancer," American Cancer Society, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/moreinformation/pregnancy-and-breast-cancer>. 9. "General Information about Breast Cancer and Pregnancy," National Cancer Institute, accessed April 26, 2013, <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/treatment/breast-cancer-and-pregnancy/patient/>. 10. Eryn B. Callihan et al., "Postpartum diagnosis demonstrates a high risk for metastasis and merits an expanded definition of pregnancy-associated breast cancer," *Breast Cancer Res Treat* 138 (2013).