Epidemiology and outcome of locally advanced and metastatic breast cancer (Dr E Rapiti)

Locally advanced breast cancer (LABC), according to the TNM breast cancer staging system, refers to patients with stage III disease. This comprises bulky invasive tumors that may have varying degrees of breast skin and/or chest wall involvement or cases with matted axillary and/or supraclavicular nodal disease.

Approximately 10% of women diagnosed with breast cancer have a locally advanced disease. Developing countries have higher rates of LABC compared with industrialized nations. Younger/premenopausal women, African Americans and women of low socioeconomic status are more likely to present with LABC.

Long term survival can be obtained in approximately 50% of women with LABC who are treated with a multimodal approach. The addition of systemic therapy to the traditional local treatment has improved prognosis. Prognostic factors include age, histological type, grade, hormone receptor status and response to neoadjuvant therapy.

Metastatic breast cancer (MBC) is a heterogeneous disease with a variety of different clinical scenarios, ranging from solitary metastatic lesion to diffuse involvement. Between 6 to 10% f breast cancer patients present with metastasis at diagnosis. The incidence of MBC has remained stable over the years.

Once metastases are detected, median survival ranges between 18 and 24 months, depending on number and site of metastatic lesions, and tumor characteristics. The five-year overall survival rarely exceeds 20%. Overall, survival of patients with MBC is slowly but steadily improving. This improvement is most probably related to the development and widespread availability of modern systemic therapies. Local treatment is recommended to prevent or relieve symptoms but is traditionally considered not to have noteworthy impact on survival. However, several recent observational studies have shown a survival advantage among breast cancer patients whose primary tumor was completely excised. Large collaborative clinical trials are needed to confirm the impact of local surgery on long term survival f MBC patients.