Statins Appear to Protect the Heart Against Breast Cancer Treatment Toxicities

Anthracycline chemotherapy and the targeted therapy trastuzumab can harm women's hearts.

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If women being treated for breast cancer take a statin, they appear to have a lower risk of sustaining damage to the heart, according to a recent study.

David Bobrowski, a medical student at the University of Toronto, presented findings from the study at the American College of Cardiology's Annual Scientific Session last month.

Second to skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common malignancy among women. An estimated one in eight women will develop breast cancer during their lifetime.

Treatment for breast cancer commonly includes anthracycline chemotherapy drugs, such as doxorubicin, and the targeted cancer medicine trastuzumab (Herceptin and generics). These treatments can cause toxic effects to the heart and in some cases give rise to heart failure.

Bobrowski and his colleagues conducted a population-based study in which they analyzed the medical records of 2,545 women with breast cancer who were treated with anthracyclines and 1,345 women who were treated with trastuzumab.

The women were all older than 65 and had no history of heart failure. They were diagnosed with early stage breast cancer between 2007 and 2017 in Ontario.

A total of 953 of the women taking anthracyclines and 568 of the women taking trastuzumab had received a statin prescription within one year of starting their cancer treatment.

The study authors matched the women taking statins with similar women who were not taking such medications, meaning they had 723 pairs of women treated with anthracyclines and 399 pairs of women treated with trastuzumab. The two groups had median ages of 69 years old and 71 years old, respectively.

The study defined heart failure as presenting to the emergency department or being admitted to

the hospital with heart failure.

Compared with women who were not receiving a statin before undergoing treatment for breast cancer, those taking a statin had a 58% lower likelihood of developing heart failure within five years of their treatment with anthracyclines and a 66% lower likelihood if they received trastuzumab.

“Our research expands on earlier, smaller studies. If these associations are confirmed in a prospective trial, this will represent an important step forward to optimize cancer outcomes by decreasing the trade-off of long-term cardiac disease or related deaths,” Bobrowski said in a press release.

To read a press release about the study, click here.

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