Right Amount of Radiation Improves Odds Against Breast Cancer

A small amount of daily radiation is good for you despite the regulatory creed.

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Women who receive the proper amount of radiation therapy following a mastectomy have better survival rates after 10 years, according to a report in the Jan. 4 issue of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

The finding may help resolve the controversy over whether radiation therapy improves survival rates and lowers the risk of recurrence in women with operable breast cancer.

Researchers at the National Health and Medical Research Council Clinical Trials Centre in New South Wales, Australia, reanalyzed results from 36 clinical trials in which the use of radiation therapy was the sole difference between treatments given to breast cancer patients.

They divided the trials into three categories: category 1, for studies that used optimal radiation doses; categories 2 and 3 for studies in which patients received an inadequate or excessive dose of radiation, or where an inadequate amount of tissue was treated.

At five years, patients in the first category had a 2.9 percent increase in survival rates with radiation therapy. At 10 years, they had a 6.4 percent increase in survival rates. In the second and third categories, radiation therapy was not associated with a difference in overall survival after five or 10 years.

The researchers recommend that post-mastectomy radiation therapy be considered for all patients at high risk.

"The evidence is now strong for survival benefits for both post-mastectomy radiation therapy and post-lumpectomy radiation therapy," they wrote.