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Contribution ID: 92

Type: 1 - Scientific Poster

Recruiting and Retaining Breast Cancer Patients undergoing Neoadjuvant Chemotherapy into a Randomized Controlled Exercise Trial

Thursday 23 July 2026 14:20 (20 minutes)

Background. Chemotherapy entails some side effects that may hinder functional performance of women diagnosed with breast cancer (BC), which may result in low exercise levels. Although evidence consistently show favorable effects of exercise on BC, more information on recruitment and adherence rates in the neoadjuvant phase is needed.

Purpose. We describe real-world numbers for the recruitment/adherence to an exercise-based RCT which targeted women with a BC diagnosis undergoing neoadjuvant chemotherapy (NACT) in the Algarve region of Portugal.

Methods. The HOME-COMBO is a 2-arm RCT to compare an online structured and supervised group cardiorespiratory/resistance exercise intervention (twice a week), with an active control group (once a week), during NACT. Inclusion criteria were age>18; BC stage I-III; scheduled to receive NACT; access to a device with internet; with no medical counterindication to perform exercise; not currently enrolled in a structured exercise program. Assessments were performed at baseline, mid-treatment, post-intervention, and on a 3-month follow-up. Different recruitment strategies were used during a complete year from presentations in the four Hospital Units, delivery of leaflets, weekly contacts, and monthly meetings with doctors and nurses. Referral was made by doctors and nurses.

Results. According to the Portuguese National Oncology Register (RON), in the Algarve region of Portugal, there are 405 new female BC diagnoses/year. The broadband internet access in the Algarve region is ~45%, meaning a potential pool of 182 women with BC that could potentially enter the study. We recruited during 1-year, and 24 women entered the Home-COMBO, of whom 4 have dropped-out (attrition 16.7%). Considering this data our recruitment rate is situated around 12.6%. From a total of 353 exercise-sessions, participants missed 93, which means an adherence rate of 73.7%. These findings are paramount for future real-world exercise interventions to be informed about the potential reach during the recruitment phase and adherence.

Keywords

Breast cancer; Home-based exercise; Neoadjuvant chemotherapy; recruitment

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

Abstract submitters declaration

yes

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Session Classification: Poster Session