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**Hormone Replacement Therapy Use After Breast Cancer:
Description of Use and Impact on Survival.**

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Background. Improved survival after breast cancer has created a large population of women with a breast cancer history. These women and their clinicians may consider various forms of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to alleviate menopausal symptoms and to prevent osteoporosis. However, the reported association between HRT and breast cancer raises concerns that HRT use may increase breast cancer recurrence and reduce survival.

Methods. Using automated cancer registry records we constructed a retrospective cohort of 11,065 female HMO members diagnosed with breast cancer from 1992 to 1998. HRT use was collected from automated pharmacy data and vital status was determined from automated California death data.

Results. A total of 565 women (5%) had at least one filled HRT prescription more than 30 days after their diagnosis with breast cancer. Obstetricians/gynecologists (48%) and primary care physicians (32%) wrote the majority of prescriptions. Compared to women with no HRT prescriptions, women filling HRT prescriptions were the same age; more likely to be white (65% vs. 78%); to have in situ or local disease (51% vs. 70%); and to survive five years (79% versus 92%). Kaplan-Meier life table analysis showed that survival was strongly associated with age, race/ethnicity, stage at diagnosis, hormone receptor status and type of surgery. In a Cox proportional hazards model of survival controlling for these variables, the rate ratio for women with at least one filled HRT prescription was 0.38 (95% confidence interval 0.26 – 0.56).

Conclusions. Despite concerns about the risk of breast cancer recurrence, HRT is being prescribed to a small number of women with a breast cancer history. Filling at least one prescription for HRT was associated with improved overall survival. The results of this study do not support concerns that post-breast cancer HRT use is dangerous and are consistent with the results of similar epidemiologic studies.