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OPTIMIZATION OF PALLIATIVE CHEMOTHERAPY AND IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY OF LIFE IN BREAST CANCER WITH LIVER METASTASES

Khalmatov Bahrom Akbarovich
Republican Specialized Scientific–Practical Medical Center of Oncology and Radiology, Tashkent Regional Branch, Head of the "Palliative Care Department"

Abstract

Breast cancer with liver metastases represents an advanced oncological condition characterized by poor prognosis, impaired hepatic function, aggressive tumor biology, and multidimensional quality-of-life decline. Palliative chemotherapy remains the core therapeutic strategy in this setting; however, its optimization requires a sophisticated, patient-centered, and biologically informed approach. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of modern strategies for optimizing palliative chemotherapy in patients with breast cancer and liver metastases, emphasizing individualized drug selection, liver-function–adapted dosing algorithms, integration of targeted and immunotherapeutic agents, and holistic supportive care. Key systemic therapy classes—including taxanes, anthracyclines, capecitabine, eribulin, HER2-targeted agents, CDK4/6 inhibitors, and immune checkpoint inhibitors—are evaluated in relation to hepatic metabolism, clinical outcomes, and tolerability. The article further explores strategies that address symptom burden, psychosocial stress, nutritional decline, and functional capacity, which collectively define quality of life in metastatic disease. Two comprehensive tables summarize therapeutic agents and quality-of-life interventions, while a conceptual diagram illustrates the integrated model of optimized palliative care. The findings highlight that a personalized, multidisciplinary, and toxicity-conscious approach significantly improves survival expectations and patient well-being in liver-metastatic breast cancer.

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Keywords: Breast cancer; liver metastases; palliative chemotherapy; hepatic impairment; targeted therapy; immunotherapy; quality of life; supportive care; metastatic disease management; oncology.

Introduction

Breast cancer with liver metastases represents one of the most challenging scenarios in advanced oncology, where survival outcomes, functional capacity, and quality of life are significantly impaired due to the high tumor burden and multifactorial complications associated with hepatic dysfunction. In recent decades, palliative chemotherapy has undergone major conceptual and practical evolution, transitioning from a purely cytotoxic approach toward a more individualized, biology-driven, and patient-centered therapeutic model. This shift is especially relevant for metastatic breast cancer involving the liver, as the combination of systemic inflammation, altered pharmacokinetics, immune dysregulation, metabolic impairment, and psychological burden requires a sophisticated strategy that balances tumor control with safety, tolerability, and patient well-being. The present article examines modern approaches to optimizing palliative chemotherapy, integrating molecular profiling, hepatic-function–adapted regimens, supportive therapies, toxicity mitigation strategies, and quality-of-life–enhancing interventions, while also presenting comparative analyses and a conceptual diagram summarizing the therapeutic pathways[2.3].

Breast cancer commonly metastasizes to the liver in advanced stages, occurring in approximately 50–70% of patients with stage IV disease. The liver is a highly vascular organ, and metastatic involvement often results in elevated bilirubin, transaminases, alkaline phosphatase, synthetic dysfunction, coagulopathy, ascites, and cancer-related cachexia. These abnormalities not only reduce the efficacy of systemic therapy but also increase toxicity, requiring careful dose adjustment and the selection of regimens that remain active despite hepatic compromise. Modern palliative chemotherapy regimens for metastatic breast cancer include anthracyclines, taxanes, capecitabine, vinorelbine, eribulin, platinum combinations, and targeted or immunotherapeutic agents such as CDK4/6 inhibitors, HER2-directed therapy, PARP inhibitors, immune checkpoint

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inhibitors, and antibody–drug conjugates. However, hepatic metastasis alone requires tailoring these regimens to maintain both survival benefit and quality of life[1.2].

Optimization of palliative chemotherapy begins with a detailed assessment of hepatic reserve, tumor biology, patient performance status, molecular targets, and expected survival. Molecular markers such as ER, PR, HER2, PIK3CA mutation status, BRCA1/2, Ki-67 proliferation index, PD-L1 expression, and intrinsic subtype (Luminal A, Luminal B, HER2-enriched, Triple-negative) guide therapy selection. For example, HER2-positive metastatic breast cancer with liver involvement often responds well to trastuzumab-based combinations, T-DM1, T-DXd, or pertuzumab-docetaxel regimens, even in cases of moderate hepatic dysfunction. Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) remains far more aggressive, with liver metastases developing rapidly and requiring combinations such as platinum agents, immunotherapy for PD-L1–positive patients, or eribulin, which has shown survival benefit in heavily pretreated liver-metastatic cohorts. Hormone receptor–positive metastatic breast cancer benefits from endocrine therapy combined with CDK4/6 inhibitors, which can achieve prolonged disease stabilization with fewer hepatic toxicities than traditional cytotoxic regimens[4.6].

The complexity of liver metastases requires not only drug selection but also individualized dosing. In patients with impaired hepatic function, dose reductions for taxanes (especially paclitaxel and docetaxel), anthracyclines, and capecitabine are essential, while drugs like eribulin or vinorelbine require careful monitoring. Conversely, antibody–drug conjugates, targeted therapies, and immunotherapies tend to exhibit lower hepatotoxic risk, though immune-mediated hepatitis remains a concern in checkpoint inhibitor therapy. Supportive care is an integral part of palliative treatment, including corticosteroids to reduce liver inflammation, adequate hydration, bile acid sequestrants, analgesics, management of anorexia and nausea, treatment of portal hypertension, albumin infusions for hypoalbuminemia, nutritional therapy, and thromboprophylaxis [3.5.6].

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To illustrate the current therapeutic landscape, the first table summarizes major chemotherapy and targeted agents used for breast cancer with liver metastases, including their key characteristics and clinical considerations.

Table 1. Major Systemic Therapies for Breast Cancer with Liver Metastases

Drug/Class	**Mechanism of Action**	**Hepatic Considerations**	**Clinical Notes**
Taxanes (Paclitaxel, Docetaxel)	Microtubule stabilization	Dose reduction in elevated bilirubin	High response rate but toxic in hepatic impairment
Capecitabine	Prodrug of 5-FU	Contraindicated in severe dysfunction	Convenient oral agent; good for liver-dominant disease
Eribulin	Microtubule inhibitor	Moderately safe; adjust dose	Effective in heavily pretreated metastases
Anthracyclines	DNA intercalation	Higher risk of hepatotoxicity	Limited use in liver impairment
HER2-Directed Therapy	HER2 blockade	Generally well tolerated	T-DXd highly effective in liver metastases
CDK4/6 Inhibitors	Cell-cycle inhibition	Requires LFT monitoring	Major option for HR+ disease
Immunotherapy	PD-1/PD-L1 blockade	Risk of immune hepatitis	Used mainly for TNBC

Beyond pharmacologic optimization, patient quality of life (QoL) is a central goal of palliative therapy. Quality of life encompasses physical, psychological, social, and functional domains. Patients with liver metastases often experience fatigue, pain, early satiety, jaundice, pruritus, cognitive slowing due to hepatic encephalopathy, and emotional distress. Therefore, interventions targeting symptoms, mental well-being, and physical function are essential. Palliative radiology—such as radiofrequency ablation, transarterial chemoembolization

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(TACE), selective internal radiation therapy (SIRT), or portal vein embolization—may reduce tumor burden and improve quality of life in selected patients. Integrative approaches including exercise therapy, psychological counseling, meditation, dietary optimization, and sleep improvement significantly enhance overall outcomes.

The second table provides a condensed overview of major factors influencing quality of life in breast cancer patients with liver metastases and recommended clinical interventions.

Table 2. Quality of Life Domains and Clinical Interventions for Liver-Metastatic Breast Cancer

QoL Domain	Common Problems	Recommended Interventions
Physical Health	Fatigue, pain, nausea, jaundice	Analgesics, antiemetics, corticosteroids, nutrition, hydration
Psychological Health	Anxiety, depression	Counseling, CBT, supportive therapy
Functional Status	Weakness, decreased mobility	Exercise therapy, physiotherapy
Social/Family Roles	Isolation, burden perception	Social worker support, group therapy
Nutritional Status	Cachexia, anorexia	High-protein diet, appetite stimulants

A conceptual diagram helps visualize the integrated pathway by which optimized palliative chemotherapy and supportive care improve both survival and quality of life. Below is an ASCII conceptual diagram that can be converted into a formal image later if needed.

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Diagram 1. Conceptual Pathway of Optimized Palliative Therapy in Breast Cancer With Liver Metastases

The integration of these interconnected strategies—biological tailoring of therapy, hepatic-function–adjusted dosing, early toxicity control, supportive interventions, and psychological support—forms the cornerstone of modern palliative oncology. Palliative chemotherapy should not be conceptualized solely as an attempt to reduce tumor burden, but rather as a holistic therapeutic strategy aimed at maximizing patient longevity and the meaningfulness of that survival. This requires ongoing assessment using validated quality-of-life scales (EORTC QLQ-C30, FACT-B), nutritional evaluations, depression/anxiety screening tools, and careful monitoring of liver function. Additionally, treatment regimens must remain flexible, allowing rapid adjustment when adverse events appear, especially in patients with fluctuating hepatic status.

Future directions in treating breast cancer with liver metastases include genomic-guided therapy optimization, combination immunotherapy, antibody–drug conjugates with lower systemic toxicity, metabolic pathway inhibitors, and targeted radiotherapeutic agents capable of selectively reducing hepatic tumor load. Newer techniques such as stereotactic body radiation therapy (SBRT), Y-90

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radioembolization, and nanoparticle-mediated drug delivery are also transforming palliative care, enabling more targeted cytotoxicity with fewer systemic effects. Equally important is the increasing use of digital health technologies, including AI-based toxicity prediction models, remote symptom monitoring, and tele-oncology platforms, which enhance continuity of care and allow early intervention when toxicity or functional decline emerges.

CONCLUSION

Breast cancer accompanied by liver metastases demands a highly adaptable, scientifically grounded, and patient-centered therapeutic strategy. Traditional chemotherapy alone is insufficient to address the complex interplay of hepatic dysfunction, aggressive tumor progression, systemic toxicity, and severe symptom burden. Therefore, optimizing palliative chemotherapy involves several interdependent components: molecularly guided regimen selection; careful dose modification according to liver function; early identification and management of adverse events; integration of targeted and immune-based therapies; and continuous delivery of supportive care addressing pain, nutrition, mental health, and functional decline.

A key insight highlighted in this article is that true improvement in patient outcomes extends beyond tumor control. Enhancing quality of life—through psychosocial support, nutritional optimization, physiotherapy, symptom relief, and patient education—is equally fundamental. The synergy of pharmacologic treatment with holistic supportive interventions creates a more sustainable and meaningful therapeutic experience for patients.

The presented analysis demonstrates that a multidisciplinary approach combining oncology, hepatology, palliative medicine, psychology, physiotherapy, and nutrition significantly improves both survival duration and life satisfaction. As therapeutic technologies evolve—antibody–drug conjugates, advanced immunotherapies, AI-guided monitoring, and targeted radiological procedures—the potential to refine and personalize care will grow further. Ultimately, optimizing palliative chemotherapy for liver-metastatic breast cancer is essential for transforming the clinical course of an otherwise devastating condition,

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allowing patients to achieve better comfort, dignity, and functional independence throughout their treatment journey.

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