

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet is about the decisions that must be made when breast cancer is suspected or diagnosed.

Breast cancer is the commonest cancer among women. In 1996, it caused 5300 deaths in Canada. In the same year, there were approximately 18 600 new cases.

There is considerable variation in the way in which breast cancer is diagnosed and treated across the country. Women and caregivers taking part in the National Forum on Breast Cancer held in Montreal in November 1993 identified a need for national guidelines for the care and treatment of this disease.

These guidelines, which appear here in an easy-to-read form for patients, have been prepared in response to this need. They are based on the more technical version entitled *Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Care and Treatment of Breast Cancer* that have been compiled for physicians.

Both versions contain the same basic information.

The guidelines are addressed primarily to women. However, men can also get breast cancer. Although much of the information presented is also applicable to men, some is not. Your doctor can advise you on specific differences.

### **What is a clinical practice guideline?**

A clinical practice guideline for breast cancer care is a set of recommendations to help women with breast cancer and their physicians deal with treatment issues about which there is some uncertainty. Guidelines try to resolve the uncertainty by a thorough review of all the medical evidence and extensive consultation with experts in the field.

The guidelines in this series were prepared by experts in breast cancer, representing Canadian national and provincial health agencies, and by women living with breast cancer. They reflect the best available scientific evidence and the consensus of experts across Canada.

### **A guideline is important for you, not just for your doctor**

If you know what the experts are recommending for your condition and *why* they're recommending it, then you'll know what to expect and be able to make the best personal choices. As an active participant in your own care, you'll know what's going on and you'll be able to ask the right questions. If you *don't* get the treatment you expect, you'll be in a position to find out why. If you feel uncertain at any stage, don't be afraid to get a second opinion. ♦