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HEALTH NEWS | Mon Oct 10, 2016 | 5:42pm EDT

## Breast cancer chemo costs vary despite similar effectiveness

By Lisa Rapaport

(Reuters Health) - Chemotherapy regimens for breast cancer can vary wildly in price even when they are comparable in their ability to combat tumors, a U.S. study suggests.

"We found that patients had high out-of-pocket costs related to their breast cancer treatment, particularly those patients who were insured through high deductible health plans," said lead study author Dr. Sharon Giordano, a researcher at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

"The high costs of care may leave some patients unable to pay their medical bills or afford their potentially life-saving medications," Giordano added by email.

At least one third of the roughly 250,000 women diagnosed with invasive breast cancer each year in the U.S. receive chemotherapy, and allowing them to choose equally effective but less costly regimens might reduce costs of treating these tumors by \$1 billion, Giordano said.

To assess the variation in chemotherapy costs, researchers looked at claims data for almost 15,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer from 2008 to 2012.

All of the women had private medical insurance starting at least six months prior to their diagnosis and continuing for at least 18 months afterward.

They all received chemotherapy within three months of diagnosis - and they all survived at least a year without any additional tumors.

Researchers calculated average total costs, including the amounts borne by women and their insurance providers, as well as out-of-pocket costs for all claims within 18 months of diagnosis in 2013 dollars.

Costs, and variation, were greatest for chemotherapy regimens built around trastuzumab (Herceptin) a targeted biotech therapy for women with one type of aggressive tumor.

Among patients who didn't receive trastuzumab, in half the cases women's insurance plans paid at least \$82,260 - but that number ranged from \$62,302 to \$104,197 depending on the drug regimen.