**Activity 3: invasive breast cancer (IBC) case studies answers**

**Carina**

**1. What physical treatments did Carina have, and in what order? Explain the role of each one.**

Carina had the following physical treatments:

* She underwent six months of chemotherapy. The role of chemotherapy is to kill or shrink cancer cells, helping to control the spread of cancer. It is often used as an initial treatment to target cancer that might have spread, or to shrink a tumour before surgery.
* After chemotherapy, Carina had a double mastectomy. The role of this surgery is to remove the affected breast to eliminate the cancerous tissue. She had a double mastectomy, which is unusual and may be because she was at high risk of developing breast cancer again (possibly due to genetics) so this would be used to reduce the risk of recurrence.
* After the mastectomy, Carina underwent three weeks of radiotherapy. The purpose of radiotherapy is to destroy any remaining cancer cells in the area, to prevent further growth or spread of the cancer.

**2. Explain why they were given in this order.**

* Chemotherapy was given first, to shrink the cancer or address any undetected spread, making the tumour easier to remove in surgery and potentially reducing the need for more invasive surgery.
* A double mastectomy was performed to remove the tumours or cancerous tissue from her breasts. By doing this after chemotherapy, the size of the tumour might have been reduced, improving the outcome of the surgery.
* After the mastectomy, radiotherapy was used to target any remaining cancer cells in the breast area. It acts as a preventative treatment to reduce the risk of recurrence.

**3. Describe the emotional impact of her cancer diagnosis and treatment.**

The emotional impact of Carina's cancer diagnosis and treatment was traumatic. She describes how the emotional toll has been overwhelming, not only on her but also on her family. The trauma of the diagnosis affects her daily life and the lives of those around her. She mentions that people often don't realise how deeply a cancer diagnosis can affect not just the patient, but also the family and friends who witness the painful journey.

**4. Suggest the physical impacts of her treatments.**

* Chemotherapy can lead to fatigue, nausea, hair loss and a weakened immune system, making the body more susceptible to infections.
* After a mastectomy, Carina may experience physical effects like pain, limited mobility in the chest area and potential complications such as lymphoedema (swelling in the arms if the lymph nodes were affected).
* The effects of radiotherapy could include skin irritation and fatigue. There may be changes in the skin such as a change in colour (it might become red in white skin, or darker than normal skin tone in non-white tones), or be dry and itchy, which would usually resolve in six to eight weeks after the completion of the treatment.

**Julie**

**1. Compare Julie's physical treatment to Carina's.**

* Julie had a lumpectomy, followed by a chemotherapy infusion when the surgery healed (about 6 weeks later), then radiotherapy every day for 3 weeks, ongoing 6-weekly chemotherapy infusions, and a tablet for 10 years to stop her cancer coming back.
* Carina had chemotherapy, a double mastectomy and radiotherapy.

**2. Suggest reasons for the difference.**

* Julie may have had a different type of breast cancer, leading to a different treatment plan compared to Carina.
* Treatment plans are tailored to each person and are based on factors such as the size, location and spread of the tumour, as well as the person’s overall health.

**3. What things helped support her mental health?**

* Written information from the breast care specialist nurse which she was able to read in her own time and write down a list of questions to be answered.
* Access to the specialist nurses via a telephone number, so she was always able to ask questions and get answers to her concerns.
* The emotional and medical support from the nursing team was a key factor in helping her maintain a positive outlook.
* Being able to maintain her sense of self by wearing a wig, which looked exactly like her normal hair.
* Realising, after time, that she can live a full life with cancer.

**4. List the people she mentions that are involved in her care.**

* Breast care specialist nurse at diagnosis and through her treatment
* Nurses in the oncology unit during chemotherapy
* My New Hair charity
* GP
* Immediate family – her mother