The relationship between the belief in a genetic cause for breast cancer and bilateral mastectomy.

Petrie KJ(1), Myrtveit SM(2), Partridge AH(3), Stephens M(1), Stanton AL(4).

Author information:
(1)Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Auckland. (2)Division of Mental Health, Norwegian Institute of Public Health. (3)Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. (4)Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles.

OBJECTIVE: Most women develop causal beliefs following diagnosis with breast cancer and these beliefs can guide decisions around their care and management. Bilateral mastectomy rates are increasing, although the benefits of this surgery are only established in a small percentage of women. In this study we investigated the relationship between causal beliefs and the decision to have a bilateral mastectomy.

METHOD: Women (N = 2,269) from the Army of Women's breast cancer research registry completed an online survey. Women were asked what they believed caused their cancer and responses were coded into 8 causal categories. Participants were also asked about the type of surgery they underwent following their breast cancer diagnosis. The odds ratios for having a double mastectomy were calculated for each causal category using random/bad luck as a referent category.

RESULTS: Hormonal factors (22%) and genetics (19%) were the most common causal belief, followed by don't know (19%), environmental toxins (11%), negative emotions (9%), poor health behavior (8%), other (6%) and random/bad luck (6%). Compared with the referent category, the odds ratio of having a bilateral mastectomy was significantly higher in both the genetics and hormonal causal belief groups (OR = 2.36, 95% CI [1.38, 4.02] and OR = 1.98, 95% CI [1.16, 3.38], respectively).

CONCLUSIONS: Beliefs in a genetic cause for breast cancer are common and are associated with high rates of bilateral mastectomy. This is despite evidence that the actual genetic contribution to breast cancer is much lower than perceived and that bilateral mastectomy is, in most cases, unlikely to improve survival. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2015 APA, all rights reserved).

PMID: 25133845 [PubMed - in process]


Rising double-mastectomy rates attract increasing scrutiny.

Jenks S.

PMID: 25677042 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]
Women with BRCA mutation have better survival rates after double mastectomy.
Printz C.
PMID: 24985248  [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

The Angelina effect: immediate reach, grasp, and impact of going public.
Borzekowski DL(1), Guan Y(2), Smith KC(2), Erby LH(2), Roter DL(2).
Author information:
(1)Department of Behavioral and Community Health, School of Public Health, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA. (2)Department of Health, Behavior, and Society, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.
BACKGROUND: In May 2013, Angelina Jolie revealed in a New York Times opinion piece that she had undergone a preventive double mastectomy because she had a family history of cancer and carried a rare mutation of the BRCA1 gene. Media coverage has been extensive, but it is not obvious what messages the public took from this personal health story.
METHODS: We conducted a survey with a representative national online panel of 2,572 adults. Participants described their awareness and identified information sources for the Angelina Jolie news story. They also reported their understanding, reactions, perceptions, and subsequent activities related to the story. We asked questions pertaining to personal and societal breast cancer risk and hypothetical questions regarding preventive surgery if the respondent or a family member were in the same position as Ms Jolie. Demographic information was collected, as was family risk for breast and ovarian cancer, and a gauge of numeracy.
RESULTS: While three of four Americans were aware of Angelina Jolie's double mastectomy, fewer than 10% of respondents had the information necessary to accurately interpret Ms Jolie's risk of developing cancer relative to a woman unaffected by the BRCA gene mutation. Awareness of the Angelina Jolie story was not associated with improved understanding.
CONCLUSION: While celebrities can bring heightened awareness to health issues, there is a need for these messages to be accompanied by more purposeful communication efforts to assist the public in understanding and using the complex diagnostic and treatment information that these stories convey.
PMID: 24357847  [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

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Many double mastectomies are not clinically indicated, study finds.
McCarthy M(1).
Author information:
(1)Seattle.
Anxiety fuels growing trends in double mastectomy.
Schmidt C.

The importance of understanding the psychological meaning of Angelina Jolie's surgery.
Goin MK(1).

Author information:
(1)Guest columnist Marcia Kraft Goin, MD, PhD, is Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at the Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California.

The recent announcement by the high profile actress, Angelina Jolie, that she had had a preventive double mastectomy because she had a high genetic risk of breast and ovarian cancer will lead other women who are at risk to consider similar operations. Psychiatrists and other physicians are likely to be asked to advise women concerning this decision. This column discusses the psychological impact of mastectomy and breast reconstruction for women and encourages clinicians to have an empathic and understanding attitude and allow patients to talk openly about their fears, doubts, concerns about sexual intimacy, and other issues. It is also important to let women experiencing psychological reactions to mastectomy know that such feelings are normal and usually recede in time.

Angelina Jolie's double mastectomy and the question of who owns our genes.
Hurley R(1).

Author information:
(1)rhurley@bmj.com

PMID: 24419311 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

PMID: 23697674 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]