

ARE BREAST CANCER PATIENTS BEING KEPT IN THE DARK?

Plastic Surgeons Show Support, Rally for a Woman's Right to Choose

Newly released statistics compiled by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) show more than 79,000 breast reconstruction procedures were performed in 2008—a 39 percent increase over 2007. Yet according to a recent report, almost 70 percent of women who are eligible for the procedure are not told about reconstructive options. Research suggests that many cancer patients are missing out on a key conversation that should take place at the time of diagnosis.

“It’s important for women to have all available information to make an educated decision says ASPS Member Surgeon Bob Basu, MD based here in Houston. “At the time of diagnosis, a patient should be immediately referred to a full team of physicians—including a plastic surgeon—so she can determine which, if any reconstruction option is best for her.”

Because early involvement by plastic surgeons and other physicians can allow for the development of an optimum treatment plan, well-established collaboration among specialties is essential. As a team, primary care, general surgery, radiology, pathology, oncology, gynecology, and plastic surgery can work together immediately following diagnosis to ensure the best possible treatment and outcome for the patient.

The patient is part of the team too, and needs to be an active participant in investigating and choosing healthcare providers and treatment. Patients who are eligible for breast reconstruction should not assume that anyone other than a board-certified plastic surgeon—affiliated with an accredited facility—is qualified to perform this procedure. While technology has made breast cancer diagnosis, treatment and reconstruction more effective than ever before, it still demands specialized medical expertise within each area of care.

For further information about choices in breast reconstruction, patients are urged to visit www.basuplasticsurgery.com or www.plasticsurgery.org/choices.

Dr. Basu is a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), the largest organization of board-certified plastic surgeons in the world. Representing more than 7,000 physician members, the Society is recognized as a leading authority and information source on cosmetic and reconstructive plastic surgery. ASPS comprises more than 94 percent of all board-certified plastic surgeons in the United States. Founded in 1931, the Society represents physicians certified by The American Board of Plastic Surgery or The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

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Breast Reconstruction Facts

- The incidence of breast cancer in women in the United States is approximately 1 in 8.
- It is critically important for women to perform regular self breast exams.
- Losing a breast is both emotionally and psychologically overwhelming; luckily most women who have mastectomies are favorable candidates for breast reconstruction.
- For breast cancer patients, all members of the medical team, including primary care, general surgery, radiology, pathology, radiation therapy, oncology, obstetrics/gynecology and plastic surgery, should be available from the onset of treatment to ensure the greatest possible outcome for the patient.
- During reconstruction, members of the medical team will work together to preserve as much breast skin as possible during mastectomy.
- More than 79,000 breast reconstructions were performed in 2008.
- New research indicates that nearly 70 percent of women eligible for breast reconstruction are not informed of their reconstructive options, a problem which is even worse among minorities.
- Education, access to care, and the team approach to breast cancer treatment are key to combating this problem.
- Every woman should have the right to choose which, if any, breast conservation or reconstruction option is best for her.
- The [Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act of 1998](#), supported by ASPS, mandates insurance coverage for breast reconstruction and the alteration of the opposite breast for symmetry for women who have undergone mastectomy.
- Women should be aware that the goal of reconstruction is symmetry, not perfection, and patients should candidly discuss expectations with their plastic surgeon.
- There are several breast reconstruction options and techniques available:
 - skin expansion followed by the use of implants.

- flap reconstruction with tissue from other parts of the body.
- Plastic surgeons help their patients identify the best approach to their reconstruction based on the patient's age, health, anatomy and goals.
 - Breast reconstruction often represents a psychological new start to life.
 - For more information on breast reconstruction, breast cancer advocacy, or the Choice Campaign, visit www.plasticsurgery.org/choices.