

PLASTIC SURGERY

P R A C T I C E A D V I S O R

Volume 2

Number 10

October 2006

Pages 109-120

Patients worry about cancer after augmentation, need counseling

Research shows little risk, but education is necessary

Although research clearly shows that patients with breast implants are not at greater risk for developing breast cancer, there is no doubt that augmentation does affect how tumors are detected. Specifically, standard mammograms might not be effective with augmented breasts. For that reason, experts say plastic surgeons should clearly explain this effect to augmentation patients and advise them about recommended ways to screen for breast cancer in the future.

Educating patients about how breast implants can influence breast cancer screening should be part of good patient care, says **Anthony Griffin, MD, FACS**, a plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills, CA, who makes a point of discussing the issue with every woman undergoing augmentation.

Fortunately, the discussion can be positive. Research shows that women with breast implants tend to have lower rates of breast cancer than the general population. Further, augmentation patients who do develop tumors may detect them earlier than women without breast implants. Researchers suspect that the reason for this is that women with implants pay more attention to their breasts (i.e., examine them more often and more closely), and that their physicians also examine their breasts regularly. (See p. 111 for more on recent research regarding breast implants and cancer detection.)

Although the research on this topic is essentially positive, **Thomas Haas, MD**, a plastic surgeon in

Louisville, KY, says surgeons have a legal responsibility to notify patients about how implants can impair some mammography. The issue is addressed in his practice's nine-page consent form, which states in boldface that "any breast implant can impair the detection of breast cancer, regardless of the type of implant or where it is placed in the breast."

Inside This Month...

- *Studies show implants affect scans but do not cause higher cancer rates. Research shows that although breast implants can necessitate extra effort to achieve a useful scan, augmentation does not increase the risk of breast cancer or delay diagnosis*111
- *Ongoing NCI study says cancer risk not elevated with implants. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) in Bethesda, MD, has been studying the risk of breast cancer from implants since 1992, and although the preliminary results suggest little reason to worry, there are still some lingering questions*112
- *Choose billing company carefully to simplify, improve your practice. High expectations should be paramount when you decide to outsource your plastic surgery practice's billing and collections, and it is up to you to verify that you will be working with the best*113
- *Collaborate with dental experts to benefit your patients and practice. It is common for patients seeking facial plastic surgery to also need dental work, but some surgeons may overlook the chance to collaborate with a dental professional who provides that side of patient care*115
- *News briefs*118

Bring the subject up right away

Broach the topic on day one, when the patient first expresses an interest in breast augmentation, Haas recommends. The reassuring nature of the research doesn't mean that you can leave this topic to be discussed after the fact, he says. Instead, explain right away that an implant won't lead to breast cancer, but might necessitate more detailed mammography.

"When you say something like that preop, it's education. When you say the same thing postop, it sounds like an excuse or like you didn't want to tell her beforehand and now you're just covering yourself," Haas says.

Haas says many patients have concerns about breast implants and cancer risk, but in his experience, most are assuaged with education about what the research has shown. However, he notes that those who are especially concerned about the risk may self select and never seek augmentation.