

CRN PROJECT POSTERS

9th Annual HMO Research Network Conference

April 1-2, 2003 Denver, CO

Cancer
47

Long-Term Psychosocial Outcomes of Bilateral and Contralateral Prophylactic Mastectomy in a Community-Based Sample

Ann M. Geiger, PhD, KPSC Research & Evaluation
Andrea Altschuler, PhD, KPNC Division of Research

Background: Bilateral prophylactic mastectomy dramatically reduces the risk of primary breast cancer in women with no breast cancer history and contralateral prophylactic mastectomy appears to reduce the risk of subsequent breast cancer in women with a history of breast cancer. However, little is known about the long-term psychosocial impact of these procedures.

Methods: Using cases from community-based medical practices with procedures done three to eighteen years ago we conducted two focus groups, one for bilateral and one for contralateral prophylactic mastectomy. An experienced facilitator using prepared questions led a discussion of the benefits and challenges women experienced, with particular emphasis on body image and sexuality. Of invited participants, 41% were available on the selected date; 17 (89%) of them participated. Participants were compensated \$50 and received dinner.

Results: Participants reported that after their procedure their sense of breast cancer risk reduction and accompanying relief from fears about breast cancer, treatment and death was considerable. However, despite pre-mastectomy conversations and deeply held beliefs that women are "more than a pair of boobs," these women face ongoing challenges to their body image and sexuality, describing themselves with words such as "maimed" and "damaged goods." Overt psychosocial distress attributed to their procedure was present in two participants; both were single at the time of their procedure and felt unable to develop intimate relationships afterwards.

Conclusions: The results of this study contribute to the body of information women at increased risk for breast cancer and their health care providers have available when evaluating prophylactic mastectomy as a preventive option.