

Are breast cancer patients being kept in the dark?

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Despite the increase of breast reconstruction procedures performed in 2008, nearly 70 percent of women who are eligible for the procedure are not informed of the reconstructive options available to them, according to a recently published report. Newly released statistics by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) shows there were more than 79,000 breast reconstruction procedures performed in 2008 - a 39 percent increase over 2007. But in spite of this, current research suggests that many breast cancer patients are missing out on a key conversation that should take place at the time of diagnosis.

"Women need to understand all of their options to make an informed decision," said ASPS President John Canady, MD. "Those who are diagnosed should be immediately referred to a full team of physicians that can provide breast care, and plastic surgeons need to be included as part of that treatment team."

Taking the position that every woman deserves the right to choose which, if any reconstruction option is best for her, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) is launching an ongoing effort to bring public awareness to breast reconstruction issues, including education, access, and a team approach. Because early involvement by plastic surgeons and other physicians can allow development of an optimum treatment plan for each individual patient, collaboration amongst specialties is essential. As such, ASPS suggests that primary care, general surgery, radiology, pathology, oncology, gynecology, and plastic surgery be available from the onset of treatment to ensure the greatest

possible outcome for the patient.

It is also important that patients actively participate in their treatment. Though a common misconception, eligible patients should not assume that anyone other than a board-certified [plastic surgeon](#) affiliated with an accredited facility is qualified to perform breast reconstruction. While technology has made [breast cancer](#) diagnosis, treatment, and reconstruction better than ever, it does not negate the need for medical expertise within each specific area of care.

Among the factors contributing to patient awareness and understanding, specific education regarding the options for breast reconstruction is often lacking. Therefore, in the coming months, ASPS will reach out to women through a variety of materials, ranging from information cards and online videos, to an ad campaign featured online and in the waiting-room publication produced by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

"We know that there are many issues surrounding breast reconstruction and that addressing them all will take time, but this is a very important first step," said Dr. Canady. "Our goal is to make sure that those women who are not getting [breast reconstruction](#) are doing so of their own accord and not because they are uneducated or uninformed about their options."

Source: American Society of Plastic Surgeons

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