

Media coverage of celebrity's mastectomy has improved public awareness of reconstructive breast surgery options

September 28 2015

A new study found improved public awareness about reconstructive breast surgery options following Angelina Jolie's decision to undergo a double mastectomy and subsequent reconstruction. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the results indicate that media coverage can serve as a tipping point for improving the general public's knowledge about a particular health topic.

In 2013, Angelina Jolie's decision to have both of her breasts removed—which she chose because she carries a BRCA1 gene mutation that puts her at increased risk of developing breast cancer—generated considerable media attention. To see if such media coverage had an effect on [public awareness](#), a team led by David Benjamin Lumenta, MD, of the Division of Plastic, Aesthetic, and Reconstructive Surgery in the Department of Surgery at the Medical University of Graz, in Austria, conducted two online polls with 1000 female participants each—one before and the other after the celebrity's announcement.

Following the announcement, there was an increase of 4 percentage points in the proportion of women aware that reconstructive breast surgery is possible after the surgical removal of one or both breasts (from 88.9 to 92.6 percent). There were even greater increases in awareness that breast reconstruction can be achieved with the use of one's own tissue (11 percentage point increase, from 57.6 to 68.9

percent) and that it can be done during the breast-removal operation (19 percentage point increase, from 40.5 to 59.5 percent). One-fifth of participants of the second poll indicated that the [media coverage](#) about Angelina Jolie's announcement made them "deal more intensively with the topic of breast cancer."

"This is the first prospective report to prove the media's effect on the healthcare-related issue of breast cancer among the general public, which was based on a serendipitous design: the initial poll on [breast reconstruction](#) was conducted a month before Mrs. Jolie's announcement, triggering a timely repetition thereafter in a second poll," said Dr. Lumenta. "Since individual choice will become a driving force for patient-centered decision-making in the future, cancer specialists should be aware of public opinion when consulting patients with [breast cancer](#)."

More information: "The Angelina effect revisited - exploring a media-related impact on public awareness." Patricia Beatrice Lebo, Franz Quehenberger, Lars-Peter Kamolz, and David Benjamin Lumenta. *Cancer*; Published Online: September 28, 2015 ([DOI: 10.1002/cncr.29461](#))

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Media coverage of celebrity's mastectomy has improved public awareness of reconstructive breast surgery options (2015, September 28) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-09-coverage-celebrity-mastectomy-awareness-reconstructive.html>

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