“It’s Like We Don’t Exist”: Tailoring Education for Young Women Undergoing Surgery for Early-Stage Breast Cancer

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PURPOSE: The implications of a diagnosis and consequent surgical treatment for breast cancer may be different for young women compared to older women. This study investigated the information requirements of young women to support their treatment decision making at diagnosis.

PARTICIPANTS & SETTING: A purposeful sample of 20 women diagnosed with breast cancer aged 40 years or younger who had undergone surgery and had participated in a large cohort study in the United Kingdom.

METHODOLOGIC APPROACH: Audio recordings of semistructured interviews were used to reveal information received at the time of surgical treatment.

FINDINGS: Themes identified were types of breast cancer, surgical treatments, nonsurgical treatments, fertility, and surgery and after surgery. Participants felt that information required throughout treatment was influenced by individual life circumstances, such as children or plans for children, relationships, and career intentions. Participants felt information was lacking on the effects of treatment on body image, reconstructive surgery, and genetic predisposition to breast cancer.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Knowledge of the information requirements of young women diagnosed with breast cancer allows nursing staff to provide tailored support at times identified as most useful.

KEYWORDS breast cancer; young women; information needs; breast cancer surgery; decision making

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