Response to “Male Patients With Breast Cancer: Addressing Needs Using an Educational Task Force”

I would like to thank Cutrone, Segna, and Baron (2018) for their very thoughtful article on male patients with breast cancer. Men with a diagnosis of breast cancer have unique needs that need to be addressed in a caring and comprehensive manner.

Male breast cancer is associated with hereditary risk for developing breast and other cancers. An estimated 4% of men with breast cancer have BRCA1 mutations, and 4%–16% have BRCA2 mutations (Giordano, 2018). Mutations in the CHEK2 and PALB2 genes have also been associated with an increased risk for developing male breast cancer (Freedman & Partridge, 2017). Knowledge that a man carries a mutation associated with a hereditary risk for developing breast cancer often guides surgery decisions, including the choice to have a risk-reducing mastectomy on the contralateral side and increased surveillance for other organs at increased risk, depending on the susceptibility associated with a mutation. The first-degree relatives of men with a pathogenic mutation have a 50% risk of carrying the mutation and would benefit from testing and, if testing positive, from more intensive screening and possibly risk-reducing surgery (National Comprehensive Cancer Network, 2018). Identifying families with genetic susceptibility can ultimately decrease the morbidity and mortality associated with malignancy.

Because breast cancer in men is associated with an increased risk of germline BRCA1 and BRCA2 and other pathogenic mutations, healthcare providers should consider referral of all men with breast cancer to a specialist in cancer genetics for a discussion of genetic testing. A diagnosis of male breast cancer satisfies criteria for genetic testing for male breast cancer to be covered by Medicare and most other private insurance carriers, so this should not be a barrier to exploring genetic testing (Brown et al., 2018; Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2018).

Gaps in knowledge about potential hereditary risk in men with breast cancer may exist. Research suggests that as many as 80% of men with a first-degree relative with breast cancer do not realize they have a hereditary risk for developing breast and other cancers, such as prostate, melanoma, and pancreatic cancers (Fentiman, 2018).

Programs that target the needs of men with a diagnosis of cancer should include information on potential risk for a pathogenic germline hereditary mutation and how to access genetic services for evaluation and education, as well as possible implications for the patient and other family members. Evidence-based guidelines state that men with a diagnosis of breast cancer should be referred for genetic evaluation (National Comprehensive Cancer Network, 2018).

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No financial relationships to disclose.

REFERENCES


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