

Breast Cancer in Men: The Importance of Teaching and Raising Awareness

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Breast cancer is prevalent among women, and although rare, it can develop in men. Society seems unaware that men can develop breast cancer, which contributes in part to late diagnoses in men. Nurses must raise awareness regarding the possible occurrence of breast cancer in men, the associated risk factors, and methods of prevention. A simple screening method, such as a breast self-examination, can be used to assist with detection of breast cancer in men. This examination can be independently performed quickly and easily, which may lead to early detection.

T.C. was a father of two and a teacher who had a deep passion for woodworking. Like most men, T.C. believed that breast cancer was a “woman thing.” One day, T.C.’s wife told him about a male coworker who noticed that his nipple was inverted. After talking to his doctor and undergoing some testing, the man was diagnosed with breast cancer. T.C.’s wife told him the story because he too had an inverted nipple. T.C. sought medical care shortly after, was evaluated, and also was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Although T.C. was an educated and informed individual, he was unaware of the possibility that breast cancer could exist in men. He knew he had an inverted nipple, but he did not know what it meant. If it was not for the coincidence of his wife’s coworker being diagnosed with breast cancer, he may not have sought care as soon as he did.

Overview

Breast cancer is a type of cancer that occurs in the breast tissue and can develop in women and men regardless of breast size. Breast cancer is the second-most common type of cancer after lung cancer, and the fifth-leading cause of cancer death in women worldwide (World Health Organization, 2009). Among all breast cancer cases, around 1% are found in men and the number of breast cancer cases in men relative to the population

has been fairly stable since the 1980s (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2009). Many people are unaware that men can get breast cancer (Breast Cancer Support, 2009). The purpose of this article is to raise awareness and encourage teaching about breast cancer in men who are at high risk for this disease. Nurses have the crucial task of raising awareness of the possibility of breast cancer in men and to teach society about the risk factors associated with it and methods of prevention.

In 2009, an estimated 1,910 new cases of breast cancer were diagnosed among men, leading to 440 deaths in the United States (ACS, 2009). Some research has shown that, despite the low occurrence rate, the disease often has a lower survival rate in men than in women because of the later detection of the disease (Breast Cancer Support, 2009). Other research disputes this finding and states that men and women with the same stage of breast cancer have the same prognosis and outlook for survival (ACS, 2009).

Society identifies breast cancer as a “woman’s” disease, and the idea of developing a feminized illness can be very distressing and stigmatizing for men (Donovan & Flynn, 2007). As a result, men

have lived in denial with the possibility that they could have breast cancer, even when visible indicators are present. Indicators may include an inverted nipple or a noticeable lump. The advanced stages at which breast cancer usually is detected in men (stage III and IV) results in the need for more invasive and longer treatment regimens with poorer prognoses (Breast Cancer, 2008). T.C. was fortunate to have been diagnosed as early as he was. Knowing that earlier detection of breast cancer can result in better outcomes, regardless of gender, is a crucial piece of education for the general public (Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, 2008).

Risk Factors

The main risk factor associated with breast cancer in men is increasing age. Most cases are diagnosed in men aged 60–70 years (Breast Cancer in Men, 2007). Another risk factor is high estrogen levels. Some estrogen is normally produced in the body of men, but producing higher levels of estrogen has been linked to developing breast cancer (Brinton et al., 2008). This genetic condition is called gynecomastia and often results in benign enlargement of male

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