



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
PLASTIC SURGEONS®



THE PLASTIC SURGERY
FOUNDATION™

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ASPS ISSUE BRIEF

Breast Cancer Patient Education Act

Empowering women with greater options on their road to recovery

Background

In 2015, an estimated 231,840 new cases of invasive breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed among women in the United States¹. The Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act of 1998² requires health plans that offer breast cancer coverage to also provide for breast reconstruction and prostheses. Breast reconstruction can be an important part of the recovery process, as it can impact the patient's psychological and sexual well-being.

While some eligible women with breast cancer undergo breast reconstruction, many women – particularly those of racial and ethnic minority groups – are not informed about their care options. This is particularly concerning as African-American women under the age of 40 have a greater incidence of breast cancer than Caucasian women of the same age. Furthermore, breast cancer is the most common cancer among Hispanic women.

Less than half of all women requiring a mastectomy are currently offered breast reconstruction surgery³. While there is no consensus as to why women are not informed of their potential care options post-mastectomy, a 2009 study conducted by the University of Michigan and Dana Farber determined that women did not undergo breast reconstruction because 1) they were not informed of their options and 2) they were not referred to a breast reconstruction surgeon.

The Solution

Women need to be informed about their options post-mastectomy. In addition to the Congressional *Breast Cancer Patient Education Act of 2015* (BCPEA), ASPS also seeks to introduce legislation in the states that would require the state to plan and implement an education campaign to inform breast cancer patients about the availability and coverage of breast reconstruction and other available alternatives post-mastectomy. Educational materials will inform women of their right to breast reconstruction under federal law and provide women with information about when breast reconstruction or prostheses may be appropriate within their recovery plan.

¹ The American Cancer Society, 2015

² Public Law 105-277

³ Potter S, Mills N, Cawthorn S, Wilson S, Blazeby J. Exploring inequalities in access to care and the provision of choice to women seeking breast reconstruction surgery: a qualitative study. *Br J Cancer*. 2013 Sep 3.