Is BRCA testing causing women to undergo unnecessary prophylactic mastectomy?

Yes. According to this cross-sectional analysis of an ongoing prospective cohort study of the trends in BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation testing, 82 (51.2%) of 160 non-BRCA mutation carriers underwent bilateral mastectomy from 2006 through 2014.

References
WHAT THIS EVIDENCE MEANS FOR PRACTICE

Although it is encouraging to see that the proportion of young women with breast cancer who are receiving counseling and genetic testing is rising, the findings from this study of highly educated, largely white and affluent women is not generalizable to all US women diagnosed with breast cancer at a young age.

That more than half of BRCA-negative women in this study chose bilateral prophylactic mastectomy, a procedure not recommended in this population, is concerning, and reflects nationwide trends. The increasing use of next-generation sequencing (which yields information on moderate- and low-penetrance genes in addition to BRCA status) means that women and their providers increasingly are being confronted with genetic testing results that call for formal genetics expertise. Unfortunately, genetics counselors remain in short supply and many clinicians without specific genetics training are offering these tests. As editorialists appropriately point out, these trends may further increase the number of relatively low-risk women proceeding with unwarranted bilateral mastectomy. In my practice, I continue to refer women whose family or personal histories indicate high-risk status to a cancer genetics counselor for formal counseling and possible testing.

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