

Awareness of Male Breast Cancer Still in Its Infancy



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Chances are miniscule to none that corporate sponsors will be lining up anytime soon to promote awareness of breast cancer in men. [The American Cancer Society](#) says about 2,190 American men will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, and about 410 will die of the disease. That may not be enough to warrant focus groups to decide on an appropriately masculine color for a ribbon, but many

of those deaths could have been prevented if the disease had been detected and diagnosed earlier.

The decades-long campaign to raise awareness of breast cancer in women has been so successful that many are suggesting a shift in focus to other important issues, such as funding for research or ridding the environment of contaminants linked to breast cancer. However, the campaign for awareness of breast cancer in men is still in its infancy.

The [HIS Breast Cancer Awareness Foundation](#) was started just two years ago by a brother and sister both diagnosed with the disease. It has a medical advisory board of four. Its Website says it was created "to assist men and women (girlfriends, wives, sisters & brothers, mothers & fathers, and friends), health care professionals, and anyone who is interested in learning about the risk, treatment(s), emotional aspect and stigmatism of men dealing with this disease."

Some individuals are doing their part to raise awareness. Charles Pelkey wrote about his experience in [a recent Huffington Post blog](#):

Since my diagnosis more than a year ago, I can pretty much drop others' responses to news of my breast cancer into three roughly-equal categories: the first, those who quite kindly express sympathy and offer support and encouragement; the second, those who express disbelief, laugh or think I'm kidding... and, my favorite, those who look at me with an air of expertise and solemnly declare that, "Oh yes, men get breast cancer, too," as if they are imparting some new nugget of knowledge to a heretofore-uninformed audience.

The lump that discovered on his chest was not Pelkey's introduction to the concept of male breast cancer.

Sadly, my favorite uncle died from metastasized breast cancer on the very morning of the ultrasound visit at which my wife and I were to learn we were having a son... Uncle Philip was like many men and didn't necessarily react when he first found that lump. He was well into stage IV when he was diagnosed. His story is what caused me to react quickly.

Within days after undergoing an ultrasound "and what the radiology tech graciously called a 'man-o-gram,'" Pelkey had a lumpectomy. The margins weren't clean, so he opted for a bilateral mastectomy. "I, a 53-year-old, 6-foot-4-inch, happily married former athlete and father of two, was getting a mastectomy."

Despite his initial embarrassment, Pelkey has made it "something of a mission to be open and honest about the whole thing." Many men who have died of breast cancer likely "had been aware of a lump but concluded -- or worse, were told by medical professionals -- that it was nothing to worry about... Had it not been for my Uncle Philip, odds are good I'd have ignored it, too."

Pelkey says he now knows that, given his family history, he was diagnosed with a very predictable genetic mutation.

Had I known, I would have learned years ago that my chances of developing breast cancer rocketed from the 0.05 percent risk faced by the general population of men to just about 7 percent...

If by potentially "embarrassing" myself, I can convince one guy who finds a lump on his chest to take the thing seriously, it's well worth it... If I'd have curled up and not spoken up, it would have been fundamentally dishonest. What's worse, I would dishonor my uncle's memory, whose own experience quite probably saved my life.

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